

## RSAI Agenda - 2025 Regional Meetings

RSAI Region	Meeting Date	Meeting Location	Meeting Time	Regional Representative
NW Region	04/01/2025	Prairie Lakes AEA 500 NE 6th Street Pocahontas	11:30 Lunch; 12 Meeting	Justin Daggett
SW Region	04/02/2025	Green Hills AEA 212 E Coolbaugh St Red Oak	11:45 Lunch; 12 Meeting	Paul Croghan
NE Region	4/24/2025	Ampersand Taproom, 110 South Frederick Oelwein	2pm Meeting; 4pm Social	Nick Trenkamp
SE Region	05/07/2025	Fairfield Arts & Conv Center, with Great Prairie AEA 200 N Main St, Fairfield	12 Lunch; 12:30 Meeting	Dan Maeder

1. **Call to Order and Welcome** by RSAI Regional Representative
2. **Approval of the Agenda**
3. **RSAI Overview and Processes** (Margaret Buckton)
4. **Election of Regional Representative to the RSAI Leadership Group**, if term expires Sept. 2025 or vacancy occurs, see chart to the right.  
*Term is 3-years, no term limits. RSAI Leadership Group meets virtually most months for approx. one hour, has responsibilities at the RSAI Annual Meeting in October, sets date/location and hosts this Regional Meeting, assists with staffing the RSAI booth at IASB Convention, and supports advocacy efforts throughout the year.*
  - a. Nominations
  - b. Election
5. **Election of Regional Representative to the RSAI Legislative Committee**, see chart on the following page.  
*Annual Election, representative(s) attend Legislative Committee Meeting in Des Moines during August, attends the Annual Meeting in Ankeny during October, and supports legislative advocacy efforts during the 2026 Session.*
  - a. Nominations
  - b. Election
6. **Review of RSAI Bylaws** (*Amendment recommendation require 2/3 vote to move to the RSAI Bylaws Committee*)
7. **Brief Review/Update of the 2025 Legislative Session** Margaret Buckton and Dave Daughton, RSAI Professional Advocates
8. **Discussion and Vote on Recommendation of 2026 RSAI Legislative Priorities** from the Region  
*(Requires simple majority vote to forward recommendations to the RSAI Legislative Committee)*
9. **Brainstorming/Networking Discussion**
10. **Other Business**
11. **Adjourn**

### RSAI Region Representatives

NW Region (Justin Daggett)  
term expires Sept. 2026

**SW Region (Paul Croghan)**  
**term expires Sept. 2025**

NE Region (Nick Trenkamp)  
term expires Sept. 2027

**SE Region (Dan Maeder)**  
**Vacant Seat July 1, 2025**  
**term expires Sept. 2026**

## RSAI Leadership Group – 2024-25

Position	RSAI Region	AEA	District	First Name	Last Name	Term Expires
At-Large & Legislative Committee	NW	Northwest	Central Lyon	Brent	Jorth	<b>Sept. 2025 (Annual Mtg)</b>
Regional Rep	NW	Prairie Lakes	Manson Northwest Webster	Justin	Daggett	Sept. 2026
Regional Rep	SW	Green Hills	Nodaway Valley & CAM	Paul	Croghan	<b>Sept. 2025</b>
Secretary/Treasurer & Regional Rep	NE	Keystone	Central & Eastern Allamakee	Nick	Trenkamp	Sept. 2027
Regional Rep	SE	Great Prairie	Davis County & Moulton Udell	Dan	Maeder	<b>Sept. 2026; Vacancy July 1, 2025;</b>
Chair, At-Large & Legislative Committee	SE	Central Rivers	Gladbrook Reinbeck	Caleb	Bonjour	Sept. 2027
Vice-Chair, At-Large & Legislative Committee	SE	Great Prairie	Eddyville Blakesburg Fremont	Scott	Williamson	Sept. 2026

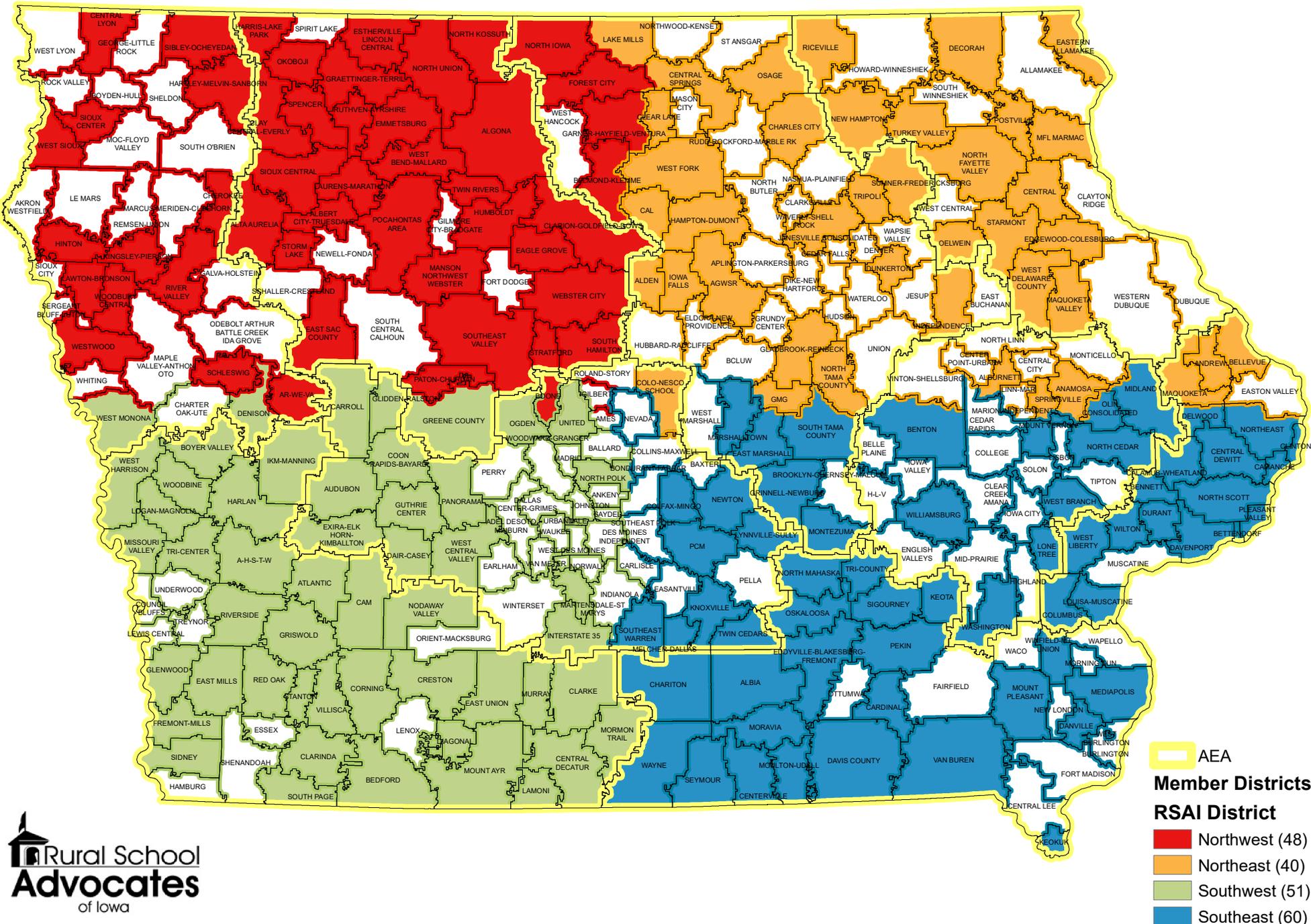
## RSAI Legislative Committee – 2024-25

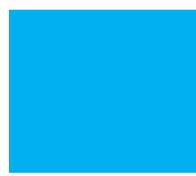
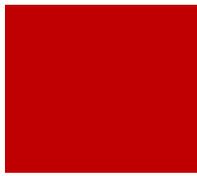
Position	RSAI Region	AEA	District	First Name	Last Name	
Committee Chair	NW	Central Rivers	Garner Hayfield Ventura	Ken	Kasper	
Committee Vice-Chair & At-Large	NW	Central Rivers	Gladbrook Reinbeck	Caleb	Bonjour	
At-Large	NW	Northwest	Central Lyon	Brent	Jorth	
	NW	Northwest	Sibley Ocheyedon	Stan	DeZeeuw	
	NW	Prairie Lakes	Southeast Valley CSD	Brian	Johnson	
	SW	Green Hills	Creston	Deron	Stender	
	SW	Heartland	Martensdale-St. Mary's	Bill	Watson	
	NE	Central Rivers	Tripoli	Jay	Marley	
	NE	Keystone	Osage & Riceville	Barb	Schwamman	
	NE	Grant Wood	Alburnett	Will	Dible	*
	SE	Central Rivers	Montezuma	Rich	Schulte	*
	SE	Grant Wood	North Cedar & Olin	Mark	Dohmen	
At-Large	SE	Great Prairie	Eddyville Blakesburg Fremont	Scott	Williamson	
	SE	Great Prairie	Centerville	Mark	Taylor	
	SE	Heartland	Newton	Tom	Messinger	
	SE	Mississippi Bend	Louisa-Muscatine	Mike	Van Sickle	*

\* Have indicated they will be unable to serve in the same role for 2025-26

# RSAI Members 2024-25

As of 3/28/2025



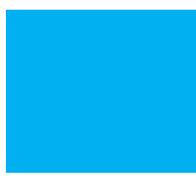
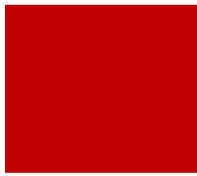


## RSAI Essential Values

### (Considerations when Formulating Positions on Legislative Issues)

**Background:** The following themes help define the organization and drive lobbying responses to proposals outside the boundaries of defined RSAI legislative priorities.

- **Students First:** State policies and resources should be designed to support schools in providing equal opportunities and success for students in **all districts of all sizes and locations**.
- **State Mandates:** Any new mandates ought to be founded on a principle of state public purpose. If the state compels school district action, the costs of that action must be initially funded and continually supported with a long-term sustainability plan.
- **Flexibility:** In education policy, one size does not fit all school districts, classrooms or students. District leaders need maximum flexibility to provide a great education to all students. The State's role is to define what outcomes are necessary for all students, leaving flexibility to schools in expenditures and policy to best determine how to deliver those intended outcomes. School districts should be trusted to exercise local authority via Statutory Home Rule.
- **Recognize Need and Capacity:** Formulas for funding should be based on student needs rather than exclusively defined based on enrollment. Per pupil funding alone does not recognize the challenge of maintaining capacity for supporting and improving education during continuous enrollment decline.
- **School General Fund Revenues Drive Instruction:** General Fund dollars pay for education. Any inequities on the expenditure side of the General Fund deprive districts of resources to pay for education. School transportation costs above the state average are a prime example.
- **Local Control:** Local leaders make the best decisions for students, especially when they have adequate flexibility and resources to make those decisions. If local stakeholders don't agree, elections have consequences. The State should exhaust other tools to correct local district mistakes when they believe those happen, rather than legislating for all districts (such tools may include but are not limited to DE review, set accreditation expectations, AEA support, SBRC oversight, etc.)
- **State Program Sustainability:** Funding for state initiatives should be defined and planned, including a plan for adequately funding the basic cost of education along the way, while defining sustainable sources of revenue for new state reforms and initiatives.
- **School Sustainability:** Decisions about school sustainability should be based on the inability to deliver student success rather than assumptions about the size of a school district. Sharing, reorganization, consolidation and dissolution decisions are best made locally. The State provides support through the provision of incentives to help eliminate barriers to those conversations.



## Thank you to RSAI 2024-25 Corporate Sponsors

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Contact [pdavis@teamdеново.com](mailto:pdavis@teamdеново.com) for more information. [www.teamdеново.com](http://www.teamdеново.com)



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More information about RSAI Corporate Sponsors at: [www.rsaia.org/corporate-sponsors](http://www.rsaia.org/corporate-sponsors)



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Contact [iowa@solutiontree.com](mailto:iowa@solutiontree.com) for more information. [www.solutiontree.com/st-states/iowa](http://www.solutiontree.com/st-states/iowa).

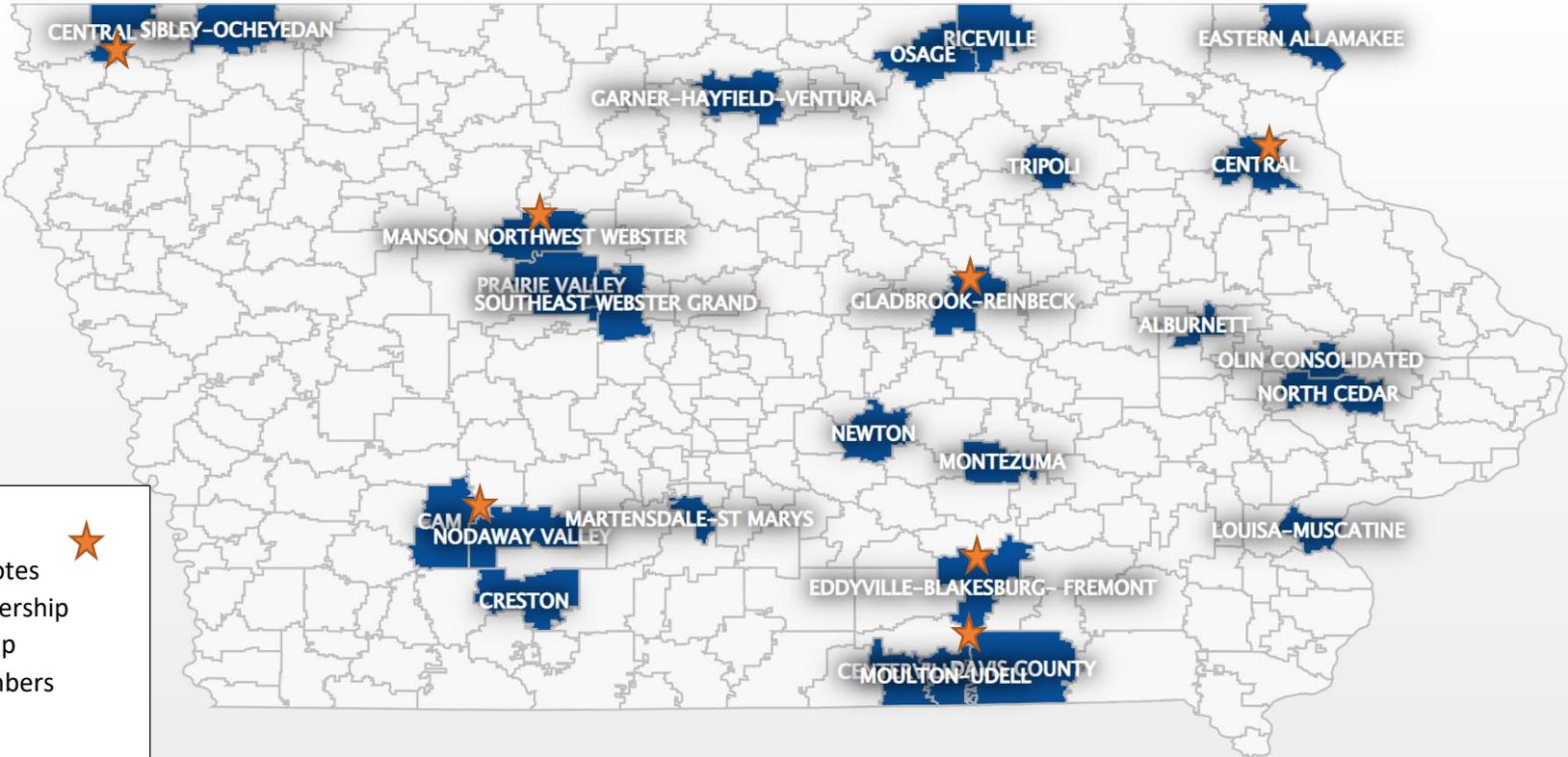


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## 2024-25 RSAI Leadership Group and Legislative Committee



Denotes Leadership Group Members

Leadership Group Members			Legislative Committee Members			
Region	Name	District	Region	AEA	Name	District
NE	Nick Trenkamp	Central/Eastern Allamakee	NE	Grant Wood	Will Dible	Alburnett
NW	Justin Daggett	Manson NW Webster	NE	Keystone	Barb Schwamman	Osage/Riceville
SE	Dan Maeder	Davis County/Moulton-Udell	NE	Central Rivers	Jay Marley	Tripoli
SW	Paul Croghan	CAM/Nodaway Valley	NW	Central Rivers	Ken Kasper	Garner Hayfield Ventura
At-Large	Brent Jorth	Central Lyon	NW	Northwest	Stan DeZeeuw	Sibley Ocheyedan
At-Large	Scott Williamson	Eddyville-Blakesburg-Fremont	NW	Prairie Lakes	Brian Johnson	Southeast Valley
At-Large	Caleb Bonjour	Gladbrook Reinbeck	SE	Great Prairie	Mark Taylor	Centerville
			SE	Mississippi Bend	Mike Van Sickle	Louisa-Muscatine
			SE	Central Rivers	Rich Schulte	Montezuma
			SE	Heartland	Tom Messinger	Newton
			SE	Grant Wood	Mark Dohmen	North Cedar/Olin
			SW	Green Hills	Deron Stender	Creston
			SW	Heartland	Bill Watson	Martensdale-St. Mary's
			Plus all three At-Large Leadership Group Members			



## **RSAI BYLAWS**

**Name:** The name of the organization shall be the Rural School Advocates of Iowa and shall be referred to below as "RSAI".

**Mission:**

RSAI will advocate for students in rural schools to assure a fair, equal, and quality education.

**Vision:**

Member schools will collaborate to promote legislation that strengthens rural education for students, by;

1. Educating 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 and unique challenges rural schools and communities face;
2. Building the capacity and understanding of other groups with similar interests on legislative and educational issues to build a stronger voice;
3. Securing adequate resources, academic and financial, to provide first class educational opportunities for students; and
4. Maintaining local control through the flexibility and authority of locally elected School Boards.

**Membership:**

Membership of RSAI shall be open to School Districts in Iowa that share the values and mission of RSAI in advocating for students in rural schools to assure a fair, equal, and quality education. Affiliate membership is extended to other organizations/entities sharing the values and mission of RSAI, as approved by the RSAI Leadership Group. Input from affiliate member organizations is valued but such organizations are non-voting affiliate members of RSAI. Affiliate membership shall be open to Governmental Entities, AEAs, Community Colleges, and Universities.

Membership in RSAI shall not be considered in lieu of membership in other organizations serving students in the state of Iowa. RSAI will work closely with all organizations sharing its Mission, Vision and Legislative priorities.

Member School Districts shall be responsible for advocating for students; creating local networks to support RSAI identified Legislative priorities; and assisting Legislators in gaining a better understanding of rural student and school needs.

Member School Districts are encouraged to create a Liaison responsible for Legislative advocacy from among its Board members to fulfill its RSAI responsibilities and act as a direct contact within the School District for RSAI.

Membership dues shall be provided each year at the RSAI Annual Meeting. Dues shall be the same for all member school districts regardless of certified enrollment. However, school districts engaged in whole grade sharing prior to the final year preceding reorganization may receive a discount of 25% each. Districts sharing in the final year prior to reorganization may each receive a 50% discount. In both cases, the two districts may determine the ratio of responsibility for payment. The Leadership Group may waive dues for districts with financial hardship. Affiliate membership fees shall be set by the Leadership Group for each year, and shall not be less than school district membership dues.

Member School Districts can withdraw membership at any point through written notification to the RSAI Leadership Group. Dues paid are non-refundable.

Member School Districts shall be entitled to participation in RSAI as follows in these Bylaws.

**Voting:**

Unless otherwise specified in these Bylaws, all voting is to be done in person and may be done electronically if identity of the individual is determined. Active electronic attendance is permitted via internet technologies and shall be considered in person for purposes of voting, or in response to survey or other electronic communication as approved by the RSAI Leadership Group. Proxy voting by School Districts is not allowed. Each District in attendance shall be entitled to one vote on all issues addressed at the RSAI Annual Meeting or as needed between RSAI Meetings as determined by the RSAI Leadership Group.

**Quorum:**

Unless otherwise specified in these Bylaws, Quorums are not required.

**Meeting Procedures:**

The latest version of Roberts Rules of Order shall be used to determine procedural questions except as otherwise directed by the membership.

**Agendas:**

Unless otherwise specified in these Bylaws, agendas must be forwarded to participants no later than 7 days prior to meetings and must include a date, time and location in addition to actions required at each meeting as per these Bylaws. Unless otherwise specified, creating agendas will be the joint responsibility of the Secretary/Treasurer and Chair of the Leadership Group and must be posted by the Secretary/Treasurer or the Secretary/Treasurer's designee.

**Vacancies:**

If the Leadership Group determines it is unnecessary to appoint to fill a vacancy, a vacancy shall remain vacant until the next election cycle.

**Representation:**

RSAI shall strive for diversity in representation of all leadership and elected positions within RSAI, including both elected Board members and Superintendents.

**Good Standing:**

Eligible officer positions can only be held by school board members and superintendents in good standing with their district's RSAI membership. Changes in status such as but not limited to failure of Board members to gain reelection to their local School Board or changes in School District employment to a nonmember district or outside of regional boundaries for the office in the case of Superintendents shall be deemed vacant.

**RSAI Regions:**

Member School Districts shall be divided into 4 Regions known as RSAI Regions. These Regions shall be defined as per the map in Appendix A - "RSAI Regions". Should a merger between one or more districts occur and both districts do not occupy the same RSAI Region, the reorganized district shall be included in the RSAI Region of the district which had the greatest land area prior to the reorganization.

RSAI Regions shall meet annually and as deemed appropriate and necessary by the RSAI Leadership Group. Each District shall be entitled to one vote on all issues addressed at RSAI Regional Meetings. A shared superintendent present at the meeting may cast one vote for each member district he/she represents.

The RSAI Regional Meeting participants shall elect an RSAI Region Representative to serve a term as specified later in these Bylaws on the RSAI Leadership Group and shall act as Chair of the Regional Meetings during their term. The RSAI Region Representative will be responsible for making all arrangements necessary for RSAI Regional Meetings during their term, ensuring that staff share an Agenda with members at least 30 days in advance of the meeting.

The RSAI Regional Meeting participants shall elect at least one Liaison but no more than one per AEA within the RSAI Region to the RSAI Legislative Committee. It shall be the responsibility of the RSAI Region Liaison, with assistance by staff, to present the RSAI Region's Legislative priorities to the Legislative Committee meeting each year. The term of office of the RSAI Region Liaison shall be one year.

At the RSAI Regional Meeting, amendments to these Bylaws may be presented for consideration. In order for an amendment to move forward to the RSAI Legislative Committee for consideration, a 2/3 majority is required.

At the RSAI Regional Meeting, Legislative priorities for the upcoming Iowa Legislative Session shall be established and forwarded for consideration to the RSAI Legislative Committee. Determination of Legislative priorities shall be based on a simple majority vote.

### **RSAI Legislative Committee:**

RSAI Region Liaisons shall gather with the At-Large Leadership Group members as the RSAI Legislative Committee annually, but in no event later than 4 weeks prior to the RSAI Annual Meeting.

The Legislative Committee will select a Chair and Vice-Chair/Secretary from among its members to conduct the RSAI Legislative Committee meeting. The term of office for both will be one year.

The RSAI Legislative Committee will be responsible for reviewing, amending as necessary and finalizing the Legislative Priorities as identified at the RSAI Regional Meetings.

The RSAI Legislative Committee shall present a set of recommended Legislative Priorities for consideration at the RSAI Annual Meeting. The recommended legislative priorities are presented as a draft with responsibility for finalizing the determination of RSAI's legislative priorities on the body of the RSAI Annual Meeting participants.

The RSAI Legislative Committee shall present any Amendments to these Bylaws for consideration at the RSAI Annual Meeting. In order for an amendment to be included on the agenda at the RSAI Annual meeting for consideration, a 2/3 majority of the RSAI Legislative Committee is required. Such proposed amendment shall be submitted to the RSAI Leadership Group at least 14 days prior to the Annual meeting.

### **RSAI Annual Meeting**

All member School Districts shall gather annually as determined by the Leadership Group. This meeting shall be known as the RSAI Annual Meeting. An Agenda of the Annual Meeting shall be sent to all member school districts no less than 30 days in advance of the Annual Meeting by the RSAI Leadership Group Chair.

At the RSAI Annual meeting, three At-Large members will be elected for membership in the RSAI Leadership Group who in conjunction with the 4 RSAI Region Representatives shall comprise the RSAI Leadership Group. RSAI Region Representatives and At-Large members will take office at the conclusion of the Annual meeting in the year in which they were elected.

At the RSAI Annual Meeting, members will approve a slate of Legislative Priorities for the upcoming State Legislative Session.

At the Annual Meeting, amendments to these Bylaws may be adopted by a 2/3 majority vote.

At the Annual Meeting, the budget for the upcoming fiscal year shall be shared with membership. The budget shall include the payment for association member services including advocacy for the upcoming year.

At the Annual Meeting, the RSAI Leadership Group Secretary/Treasurer shall present an Annual Audit or an annual financial report for the most recently completed fiscal year.

**RSAI Leadership Group:**

As specified, 4 Region Representatives and 3 At-Large members shall comprise the RSAI Leadership Group.

The Election cycle shall be maintained to ensure continuity of a rotating three-year cycle:

- RSAI SW Region & 1 At-Large
- RSAI NE Region & 1 At-Large
- RSAI NW Region, RSAI SE Region & 1 At-Large

It shall be the responsibility of the RSAI Leadership Group to direct operations of RSAI; select, retain and evaluate the services of the Professional Advocate; establish dues for the upcoming fiscal year, coordinate local network efforts with member school districts and the Professional Advocate; create and conduct School District network training; conduct the RSAI Annual Meeting; coordinate annual legislative activities and encourage membership in affiliate associations where appropriate.

Members of the RSAI Leadership Group will select the following positions from among its membership by vote annually: Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary/Treasurer.

It shall be the responsibility of the Chair to create agendas for meetings as required in these Bylaws; act as the official spokesperson for RSAI; and preside at meetings.

It shall be the responsibility of the Vice-Chair to act as temporary Chair when the Chair is absent, or in the case of the Chair vacating the office, to act as Chair until the next election of officers.

It shall be the responsibility of the Secretary/Treasurer to monitor all appropriate records and amounts deposited into or withdrawn from the bank account(s); conduct an annual audit or annual financial report for presentation at the Annual Meeting; maintain minutes of each meeting; and file (or confirm that staff has filed) any reports necessary with the Iowa Secretary of State and State Legislature regarding non-profit status and lobbying activities as required.

A majority of members is required in order to conduct business at the RSAI Leadership Group meetings.

A vacancy in the Leadership Group may be filled by the Leadership Group at its next regular meeting or subsequent meeting by majority vote. Vacancy of a Region Representative must be filled by a member school district in the same RSAI Region. At-Large vacancies may be replaced by any member school district. Notice of vacancy and intent to appoint a replacement

shall be sent to all appropriate member districts soliciting interest.

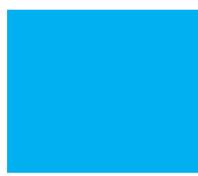
The RSAI Leadership Group shall be responsible for determining legislative positions responding to legislation that arises between annual meetings that the RSAI Legislative Committee and list of legislative priorities did not anticipate or address.

The RSAI Leadership Group may appoint Committees as deemed necessary. These Committees shall be tasked with a specific objective. The duration of the Committee shall be limited and end with a report to the Leadership Group on a specific date to be established at their inception. Committees shall make recommendations to the RSAI Leadership Group, but shall not adopt policy, take independent action or endorse any entities that will do either.

Regular meetings of the RSAI Leadership Group shall occur monthly or as otherwise directed. A meeting schedule of all meetings shall be developed by the RSAI Leadership Group for the year following the Annual Meeting. At the discretion of the RSAI Leadership Group, regular meetings may be held electronically but must include an interactive format and may be recorded.

An Agenda including the time and location of a Regular meeting shall be forwarded to all members of the Leadership Group at least 1 week in advance of the meeting by the Chair of the Leadership Group or the Chair's designee.

Adopted: January 18, 2014  
Amended: October 25, 2014  
Amended: June 15, 2015  
Amended: October 12, 2016  
Amended: October 25, 2017  
Amended: October 24, 2018  
Amended: October 21, 2020  
Amended: October 26, 2021  
Amended: October 25, 2022  
Amended: October 17, 2023



## RSAI 2025 Regional Meeting Legislative Priorities & Services Discussion

### Top Priorities for the 2025 Legislative Session:

	2025 RSAI Legislative Priority	Delete	Keep	Changes/Notes
1	Adequate School Resources			
2	Address Staff Shortages			
3	Quality Preschool			
4	Local School Board Authority			

### Other Priorities for the 2025 Legislative Session:

	2025 RSAI Legislative Priority	Delete	Keep	Changes/Notes
5	Public School Priority			
6	Increasing Student Needs Including Poverty and Mental Health			
7	Whole Grade Sharing & Reorganization Incentives			
8	Operational Sharing Incentives			
9	Formula Equity			

	2025 RSAI Legislative Priority	Delete	Keep	Changes/Notes
10	Bond Issue Dates			
11	Area Education Agencies			

**New Legislative Priorities for 2026:**

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**Issues needing more information:**

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**What other programs/services should RSAI look into to serve members?**

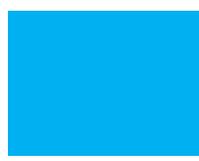
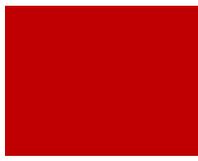
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## RSAI LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

### Top Priorities for the 2025 Legislative Session

As approved by members at the Oct. 15 Annual Meeting and by the Nov. 13 Leadership Group

#### **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.

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.

#### **Address Staff Shortages:**

In both the short and long term, policies based on trust that 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 programs like the Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship Grant Program, TPRA, funded initially by state pandemic funds that are soon to expire. These programs should be simplified to make them manageable for smaller districts to administer.

**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.

### **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. Local districts should have the authority to determine what level or combination of programming is best for their community based on student needs and staff and facility capacity.

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 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.

### **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.

## OTHER RSAI PRIORITIES

### **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.
  - d. Local school districts should receive all categorical funds based on the ESA student count, and those funds should be allowed for any use as directed by the school board to best meet the needs of students enrolled in the public school.
- 2) ESAs should not be expanded to homeschool students or nonaccredited 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 ESAs should be open to an audit and financial review to ensure funds are spent appropriately.

### **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.

### **Whole Grade Sharing and Reorganization Incentives**

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.

### **Operational Sharing Incentives**

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, and expanded sharing options with AEA staff to replace services stressed by economics of scale and AEA restructuring, should be exempted from the cap (following the 2024 precedent, which exempted work-based learning coordinators from the cap).

**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.

**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. Bond issues should be approved by a simple majority of voters (50% +1), rather than a super majority (60% +1), school districts should be given options of multiple election dates yearly, and only one vote should be required regardless of the levy amount, up to the \$4.05 maximum levy.

**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.