

RSAI Annual Meeting Resources: If you missed the Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2023, RSAI Annual Meeting, you can still access resources. Guest Speaker: [David Peters](#), Professor of Agriculture and Rural Policy Sociology, ISU, shared research about rural communities that are “Shrinking Smart”. ["Shrink Smart" Presentation Slides](#) | [Shrink Smart Report](#) | [Leadership](#) | [Volunteering](#) Attendees set a slate of priorities for the 2024 Session, which are now available on the RSAI website under the Meetings header: [2024 Approved Priorities](#). Other resources you can access from the meeting include the [Meeting Materials Packet](#), a PPT about the upcoming Legislative Session [2024 Session Preview](#), and a [Sample Press Release](#) to notify local media about RSAI priorities. Advocacy materials will be available soon, including updated Position Papers. Thank you to the 2023 RSAI Annual Meeting Sponsor [Denovo Construction Solutions](#)

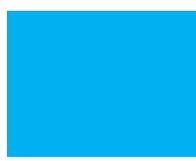
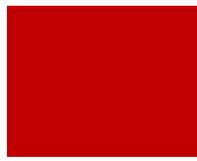
Dropout Prevention and At-Risk Task Force: [SF 560 Education Appropriations](#) directed the DE to convene a task force to study funding for At-Risk students and DoP and report their findings to the legislature by Dec. 31, 2023. The task force held their first of three meetings on Oct. 25. The task force is directed to consider:

- How schools currently use state funding for programs for at-risk and DoP and the effectiveness of such programs. (*Note: DoP is locally funded not State funded, while At-Risk funding is through the formula which is a combination of state and local funds.*)
- Whether and to what extent state funds should be reallocated to Jobs for America's Graduates (iJAG) and how to best utilize state funding for at-risk and DoP programs.

Advocacy Actions:

- Reach out to your legislators about the importance of local control in best determining how to spend Dropout Prevention and At-risk funds to support student needs. Let them know how you are using these funds and what might happen if the funding was redirected specifically to iJAG.
- Share the new slate of RSAI priorities with your legislators, too. With record surplus at the state level, there is great opportunity for adequate SSA funding and investing in preschool, operational sharing, a poverty factor in the formula, and staff recruitment and retention for public schools.
- Thanks to many of you who have met with your area Senators and Representatives. We encourage schools to invite legislators to see innovative or time-tested programs in your schools, meet students and talk to local leaders about what they can do to help you educate students. Look to the [2023 RSAI Advocacy Handbook](#) for ideas or just call Dave or Margaret for help in creating a quality local conversation. Reach out to RSAI advocacy staff for assistance: margaret.buckton@rsaia.org or dave.daughton@rsaia.org

Thanks to all of you for your energy and voice on behalf of the students in your schools!



2024 RSAI Legislative Priorities Approved at the Oct. 17 Annual Meeting

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 29th 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, increase state funding for teacher salary supplement, 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 28th in the nation in average teacher pay (including TLC for teacher leaders at the high end) and starting teacher pay was ranked 38th (*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 lowans 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.
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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 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 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.

Area Education Agencies: Direct the RSAI Leadership Group to draft a priority to support AEAs (provision of services are critical to rural schools and students).