FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Rural School Advocates Set 2024 Legislative Agenda**

*FFA Enrichment Center, DMACC Campus, Ankeny, Iowa October 17, 2023*

Member school districts of the Rural School Advocates of Iowa convened their Annual Meeting on Tues., Oct. 17, at 4:30 PM at the FFA Enrichment Center in Ankeny. RSAI advocates on behalf of the students, parents and communities in rural Iowa to ensure all students have access to a great Iowa education, regardless of where they live. RSAI members include 187 Iowa school districts, several of which are among the largest geographic school districts in the state. All nine area education agencies, Iowa’s three Regents’ Universities and Des Moines Area Community College are affiliate members of RSAI.

**Adequate School Resources:** State Supplemental Assistance, or SSA, was a top priority for RSAI members, since this funding supports the very survival of rural schools. Last month, Gov. Reynolds [announced](https://governor.iowa.gov/press-release/2023-09-27/gov-reynolds-announces-iowa-budget-surplus-183b) Iowa’s Fiscal Year 2023 surplus of $1.83 billion in the General Fund, plus $902 million in reserve funds and $2.74 billion in the Taxpayer Relief Fund. Attendees discussed the impact on rural schools if additional tax cuts are made rather than directing a portion of the State’s combined coffers totaling over $4.6 Billion to public schools. Despite the state’s fiscal strength and high inflation, the Legislature set a modest increase of 3.0% per student last year. The state’s increases in revenues per student have lagged rural school costs of educating students in 13 of the last 14 years. [Enter quote here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]

**Staff Shortages:** is also high on the list of priorities for rural schools who are struggling to recruit and retain great teachers, paraeducators, bus drivers and staff. Although adequate funding would help make school employees’ pay competitive with other jobs, it would not alone be enough. Attendees discussed the need for school leaders and state officials to change the culture of political speech; to restore education to a respected profession. [Enter quote here: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]

RSAI members also affirmed the following issues as priorities for the 2024 Legislative Session:

* Oppose expansion of Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) to homeschool and support: 1) a level playing field, 2) oversight of ESA, and 3) funding to follow students to public school who withdraw from private school.
* Opportunity Equity, Increased Student Needs and Mental Health resources.
* Quality Preschool including 1.0 weighting for full-day programs.
* Extension of Whole Grade Sharing, Reorganization and Operational Sharing Incentives.
* Local School Board Authority rather than state-directed mandates.
* School Foundation Formula Equity to close the per pupil funding gap within 10 years.
* Bond Issue Elections limited to November (Oppose) and Simple Majority vote (support).
* Supported Area Education Agencies (AEAs) and the services they provide to rural schools.

**Resources:** Position Papers on key issues and a Digest of the 2023 Legislative Session are available on the RSAI legislative website at: <http://www.rsaia.org/legislative.html> or by contacting Margaret Buckton, Professional Advocate, RSAI Margaret.buckton@rsaia.org or 515.201.3755, or Dave Daughton, RSAI Grassroots Advocate, dave.daughton@rsaia.org.

**Additional Contacts:** Paul Croghan, Superintendent, Nodaway Valley & CAM, Chair of RSAI Leadership Group, paul.croghan@rsaia.org, (641) 743-6127

Scott Williamson, Superintendent, Eddyville-Blakesburg-Fremont CSD, Chair of RSAI Legislative Committee, scott.williamson@rsaia.org, (641) 969-4226

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