

RSAl Annual Meeting Minutes

Oct. 9, 2025 4:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Solution Tree Iowa Training Center
611 5th Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa, 50309

1. **Call Annual Meeting to Order.** Caleb Bonjour, RSAI Leadership Group Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm.
2. **Approval of the Agenda.** *Brent Jorth, Central Lyon CSD moved approval of the agenda. Kurt DeVore, Clarke CSD, seconded. Vote was unanimously approved.*
3. **Introductions of Meeting Attendees.** All meeting attendees introduced themselves, indicated if they were part of the Leadership Group or Legislative Committee, and shared why they are RSAI members.
4. **Annual Meeting Business:** Jeremy Hissem, Van Buren County CSD and Secretary/Treasurer of the RSAI Leadership Group, reviewed the financial reports included in the materials packet including the 2024-25 Financial Report & Annual Audit, the 2025-26 Budget and Professional Advocate Payment, and the 2025-26 RSAI Membership Dues schedule.
5. **Report Results of Election of Region Representatives to the Leadership Group.** Caleb Bonjour welcomed recently elected or appointed representatives to the Leadership Group including:
 - Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD and Riceville CSD, NE Region, thru Sept. 2027
 - Ron Lorenz, Red Oak CSD, SW Region, thru Sept. 2028
 - Jeremy Hissem, Van Buren County CSD, SE Region, thru Sept. 2026
6. **Election of RSAI At-Large Representative to the Leadership Group.** The at-large position currently held by Brent Jorth, Central Lyon CSD, is up for election at this meeting. Any board member or superintendent in a member district is eligible for the seat. The at-large members also serve on the Legislative Committee in addition to their Leadership Group duties.

Deron Stender, Creston CSD, nominated Brent Jorth, Central Lyon CSD, for another term as the at-large representative. Seconded by Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD and Riceville CSD. No other nominations were brought forth. Results of the vote were unanimous to elect Brent Jorth, Central Lyon CSD, to serve as the RSAI Leadership Group At-Large representative through October 2028, with the exception of Brent Jorth, Central Lyon CSD, who abstained.
7. **Presentation on “Why Rural Matters” by Dr. Melissa Sadorf, Executive Director, National Rural Education Association:** Dr. Sadorf shared a presentation on “Why Rural Matters,” annual report which will be posted on the NREA website after their annual research symposium and conference, after Oct. 15. There will be a specific state level ranking page for Iowa. Dr. Sadorf congratulated Iowa rural districts on being leaders for students, with high graduation rates and commitment to early childhood education,

making sure that so many 4-year-olds have a quality preschool program to give them a good start for success. She also discussed Iowa's challenges, similar to the rest of the nation, facing critical staffing shortages and workforce, transportation and student well-being. She acknowledged the innovative energy and collaboration required for student opportunity and success. Dr. Sadorf also shared that, based on US Census codes, over half of Iowa's schools and about a third of students are in rural settings. She promised that the "Why Rural Matters 2025" will spotlight Iowa's balance of stability and innovation. Dr. Sadorf summed it up, the "Rural student success is Iowa student success." The Presentation and related data will be posted on the RSAI Annual Meeting webpage at: <https://www.rsaia.org/annual-meeting.html>

8. **RSAI Successes and Advocacy Impacts:** Margaret Buckton, RSAI Professional Advocate, and Dave Daughton, RSAI Grassroots Advocate, provided information about successful advocacy efforts. The slides of their presentation are posted on the RSAI Annual Meeting webpage at: <https://www.rsaia.org/annual-meeting.html>. Attendees then broke into groups to discuss and share advocacy ideas with one another and then reported back to the whole group..

A brief break for dinner took place at this time.

9. **Report of Aug. Legislative Committee Meeting.** Ken Kasper, Garner-Hayfield-Ventura CSD and Chair of the 2025-26 RSAI Legislative Committee acknowledged the work of the Legislative Committee members and discussed the process the Committee went through during their August meeting to prepare the 2026 recommended legislative priorities being presented.

10. Establish RSAI legislative priorities for the upcoming 2026 Legislative Session

- **Adequate School Resources for Public Schools:** 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. The legislature shall follow the statutory requirement to set SSA within 30 days of the release of the Governor's budget. What schools can deliver is dependent on the level of funding provided, which begins with the 2026-27 school year and requires a consistent and sustainable commitment.

Deron Stender, Creston CSD, moved approval as presented. Scott Williamson, Eddyville-Blakesburg-Fremont CSD, seconded.

Motion to amend by adding "for Public Schools" to the title of the priority was made by Stan De Zeeuw, Sibley-Ocheyedan CSD. The motion to amend was seconded by Kurt DeVore, Clarke CSD. Discussion ensued. Motion on the amendment carried by the majority.

Motion to amend by adding a sentence "" was made by Ron Lorenz, Red Oak CSD. The motion to amend was seconded by David Hill, Waverly-Shell Rock CSD. Discussion ensued. Motion on the amendment carried by the majority.

Priority as amended was approved unanimously.

- **Rural Access to AEA Services:** Due to changes in economy of scale and AEA staffing challenges, rural schools may face both unaffordable costs and growing inequities in access to essential services. Education services such as crisis support, instructional materials, and professional development, along with media services such as software, technical equipment, and virtual libraries—once provided by AEAs—may now come at prices rural districts cannot sustain. Without sufficient increases in SSA to cover these new expenses, and with fewer dollars flowing to AEAs, rural students and staff risk losing access to necessary support and services, creating a widening gap in educational opportunities and resources.

Rich Schulte, Montezuma CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Barb Schwamman, Osage CSD and Riceville CSD. Discussion ensued around ensuring we're not just recreating new consortiums to replace the AEAs, as well as around the specific ask we're making in this priority or if it's just an awareness issue, or perhaps it's too new for us to know specifically what we need in this area.

*Rich Schulte, Montezuma CSD, amended his motion to **direct the RSAI Leadership Group to discuss explicit ask, core services and task force potential, and maintaining special education at least at the 90%.** The motion to amend was seconded by Stephanie Mishler, Central DeWitt CSD.*

Vote on the priority, including the amendment suggestion for RSAI Leadership to consider additional specifics, was unanimously approved.

- **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:

Candidate Pool: dwindling for high needs areas (especially special education, CTE, fine arts, math and science, most secondary areas), fewer applicants, concerns about quality of candidates, difficulty in obtaining the right credentials (for example, work-based learning coordinator), and specific content areas that are challenging to nearly all rural districts.

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 sustain and simplify successful programs like the Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship Grant Program, TPRA, funded initially by state pandemic funds.

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 all retired employee categories (such as bus drivers, coaches, paraeducators and others), 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. State investment in higher teacher pay minimums is a great start, but must grow to keep up with other states and the Iowa economy. If funding is not sufficient, mandated minimums further stress the ability of school districts to adequately pay teachers between or above the minimums and nonteaching staff. Inadequate funding through Teacher Salary Supplement (TSS) has created salary compaction issues. 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 and hourly pay shortfalls, while minimizing per pupil inequities in the formula.

Erik Smith, New Hampton CSD & Turkey Valley CSD, moved approval as presented. Jeremy Hissem, Van Buren County CSD, seconded. Discussion ensued around how much TPRA money will be left after the grant is concluded, and what will happen to it, and comments made recently from state leadership indicating they believe there is no longer a lack of teacher shortage. Vote on original motion was unanimously approved.

- **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.

Scott Williamson, Eddyville-Blakesburg-Fremont CSD, moved approval as presented.

Seconded by Brian Johnson, Southeast Valley CSD & Paton-Churdan CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **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.

New state programs or mandates should be given adequate time to study, plan and implement. Local leaders have been required to redirect energy away from established plans for student outcomes and instructional work to implement mandates prior to support, administrative rules, and guidance from the state, being forced to make big changes after an immediate effective date, only to revisit the details down the road. Thoughtful timelines based on input from schools, respecting the school cycle, would allow rural school leaders to be willing partners and advocates for state-driven improvements.

Additionally, local school boards should be given flexibility to determine when best to start school based on student and community needs.

Stan De Zeeuw, Sibley-Ocheyedan CSD, moved approval as presented. Jay Marley, Tripoli CSD & Nashua-Plainfield CSD seconded. Discussion ensued. Vote was approved with one in opposition.

- **Public School Priority:** As Iowa public schools are the first choice of over 90% of Iowa families, they must be adequately funded and supported by the State, including adequate funding and needed flexibility.
 - 1) RSAI supports the following changes to Education Savings Accounts (ESA) policy and mandates on public schools to support nonpublic schools and students.
 - a. Local school districts should receive all categorical funds based on the ESA student count. Those funds should be allowed for any use directed by the school board to best meet the needs of students enrolled in the public school.
 - b. Public schools should be relieved of the mandate to reimburse private school parents or provide transportation for private schools.
 - c. Private school students returning to public school after the October enrollment count date should be funded in a timely manner.

- d. ESA applications should be submitted by the March 1 open enrollment deadline and approved timely to inform both public and private schools for staff and budget planning.

2) ESAs should not be expanded to homeschool students or nonaccredited private schools. The state should require a rigorous accreditation process to maintain high standards of education for Iowa students enrolled in private schools.

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 subject to an audit and financial review to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent appropriately.

Stephanie Mishler, Central DeWitt CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Rich Schulte, Montezuma CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **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. The legislature should continue to address the shortage of mental health professionals statewide and to 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.

Tom Messinger, Newton CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Stephanie Mishler, Central DeWitt CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Whole Grade Sharing & Reorganization Incentives:** Iowa rural districts are likely to experience another round of consolidation given trends in declining enrollment, increased accreditation expectations and low funding. Whole Grade Sharing and Reorganization incentives, expired last 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 experience for students. These incentives should be extended for at least ten years.
- **Operational Sharing Incentives:** Operational Sharing Incentives should continue and be increased. Weightings should be sufficient to encourage and support sharing opportunities, with a 3-student weighting at a minimum per position. 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, including school resource officers, and expanded sharing options with AEA staff to replace services stressed by economics of scale and AEA restructuring, should be exempted from the cap.

Autumn Pino, Lisbon CSD & Springville CSD, moved approval for Whole-Grade Sharing & Reorganization Incentives as presented. Mark Dohmen, North Cedar CSD & Olin CSD moved approval for Operational Sharing Incentives as presented. Seconded of both priorities by Erik Smith, New Hampton CSD & Turkey Valley CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **Formula Equity:** Investments in formula equity should continue, closing the \$135 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.

Adam Magliari, Mediapolis CSD, moved approval as presented. Seconded by Brian Johnson, Southeast Valley CSD and Paton-Churdan CSD. Discussion ensued. Vote was unanimously approved.

- **(New priority) Property Tax Reform:** RSAI supports the following principles to guide property tax legislation: 1) preserve state general fund capacity to adequately fund Iowans' priorities including a quality public education for all children, 2) retain local school board and voter authority to fund infrastructure, technology and school safety via PPEL, SAVE and Debt levies, 3) provide local school board authority to continue pre-reform voter-approved amounts (levies and total dollars anticipated) through transition periods, and 4) move toward a more transparent system, require clear and simple property tax statements, remove rollbacks and provide clearly understood property valuations and TIF impacts on taxpayers.

The Tax Foundation's Study, "Securing Property Tax Relief in Iowa," 2025, supports some of Iowa's proposed legislation to limit levies rather than assessments, phaseout of existing rollbacks, excluding new property in calculating limits on the new mill levy, and incorporating voter overrides from the 2023 reforms. These experts also advise Iowa to:

1. incorporate inflation into the levy limit (not a fixed 2% growth limit, for example),
2. tie future limitations to legal taxing authority maximums and not to actual tax revenue in the prior year, "levy limits should neither force nor inhibit lower taxes by local governments", and
3. future limits should be recession proof (tie to a baseline rather than a lower valuation if property values fall).

The study also recommends local governing bodies should be allowed to ask voters to approve increases above the limit. "These voter overrides force the increase to be a conscious choice, not one implemented merely through valuation growth."

RSAl opposes any limitation or restriction on the management fund, since local taxpayers have the authority to contest management levies to the Appeal Board.

Regarding debt levies and bond issues, 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.

Brent Jorth, Central Lyon CSD, moved approval of the new Property Tax Reform priority as presented. Seconded by Stan De Zeeuw, Sibley-Ocheyedan CSD. Discussion ensued.

Motion to amend the priority by striking all original language in the next to last paragraph and instead adding, "RSAl opposes any limitation or restriction on the management fund, since local taxpayers have the authority to contest management levies to the Appeal Board" was made by Ron Lorenz, Red Oak CSD. The motion to amend was seconded by Stephanie Mishler, Central DeWitt CSD. Additional discussion ensued. Motion on the amendment carried by the majority.

Vote on the priority, including the amendment, was unanimously approved by the majority.

- **Other:** No other priorities were raised by the group.
11. **Spreading the Word:** Margaret Buckton, RSAl Professional Advocate, encouraged attendees to submit a press release to their local newspaper, write a letter to the editors, and build coalitions at the local level.
 12. **Focus Area Prioritization:** Margaret Buckton, RSAl Professional Advocate, explained a process whereby each attendee was provided 6 stickers and asked to place them on the various priorities according to their importance to their school district. RSAl Staff will compile the results from the Annual Meeting as well as survey of the overall RSAl membership. This information will inform the Leadership Group's prioritization of priorities and preparation of advocacy materials prior to the 2026 Session.
 13. **Adjourn:** The meeting was concluded by mutual consent at 7:57 p.m.

RSAI Annual Meeting Attendees:

Yellow = Current Leadership Group/Legislative Committee Members;

Gray = Non-Voting Affiliate Members/Non-Member Districts/Guests

District	First Name	Last Name	Member
AHSTW	Darin	Jones	Yes
CAM & Nodaway Valley	Pam	Stangeland	Yes/Yes
Central DeWitt	Stephanie	Mishler	Yes
Central Lyon	Brent	Jorth	Yes
Central Springs	Wade	Grinhaus	Yes
Central Springs	Jean	Schilling	Yes
Clarinda & South Page	Jeff	Privia	Yes/Yes
Clarke	Kurt	DeVore	Yes
Clarke	Angela	Williams	Yes
Colfax-Mingo	Mary	Poulter	In Progress
Colfax-Mingo	Tim	Salmon	In Progress
Creston	Deron	Stender	Yes
Decorah	Tim	Cronin	Yes
Eddyville Blakesburg Fremont	Scott	Williamson	Yes
Garner Hayfield Ventura & Rudd Rockford Marble Rock	Ken	Kasper	Yes/Yes
Gladbrook Reinbeck	Caleb	Bonjour	Yes
Hampton-Dumont	Tim	Felderman	Yes
Harlan	Jenny	Barnett	Yes
Lawton-Bronson	Dennis	Reinke	Yes
Lawton-Bronson	chad	shook	Yes
Lisbon & Springville	Autumn	Pino	In Progress/Yes
Madrid	Matt	Marietta	No
Mediapolis	Adam	Magliari	Yes
Montezuma	Rich	Schulte	Yes
New Hampton & Turkey Valley	ERIK	SMITH	Yes/Yes
Newton	Tom	Messinger	Yes
North Cedar & Olin	Mark	Dohmen	Yes/Yes
Norwalk	Shawn	Holloway	Yes
Ogden	Joshua	Heyer	Yes
Okoboji	Will	Dible	Yes
Osage & Riceville	Barb	Schwamman	Yes/Yes
Red Oak	Ron	Lorenz	Yes
Red Oak	Nate	Perrien	Yes
Rock Valley	Matt	Van Voorst	No
Sibley-Ocheyedan	Stan	De Zeeuw	Yes
Southeast Valley & Paton-Churdan	Brian	Johnson	Yes/Yes
Starmont	Rob	Busch	Yes
Tripoli & Nashua-Plainfield	Jay	Marley	Yes/No
Van Buren County	Jeremy	Hissem	Yes

District	First Name	Last Name	Member
Waverly-Shell Rock	Dennis	Epley	Yes
Waverly-Shell Rock	David	Hill	Yes
Great Prairie AEA	Nathan	Wood	Affiliate
Great Prairie AEA	Jamie	Cranston	Affiliate
Heartland AEA	Cindy	Yelick	Affiliate
Keystone AEA	Annette	Hyde	Affiliate
University of Northern Iowa	Sharon	Dentlinger	Affiliate
Denovo Construction	Russ	Reiter	Sponsor
Denovo Construction	Mike	Pardun	Sponsor

RSAI/ISFIS Staff Attendees

RSAI Professional Advocate, Margaret Buckton, margaret@iowaschoolfinance.com

RSAI Grassroots Advocate, Dave Daughton, dave.daughton@rsaia.org

RSAI Accountant, Jen Albers, jen@iowaschoolfinance.com

ISFIS School Finance Director, Ken Sturgis, ken@iowaschoolfinance.com

And helpers

Minutes respectfully submitted, Oct. 9, 2025 by RSAI Staff, Margaret Buckton and Jen Albers