

# RURAL SCHOOL ADVOCATES OF IOWA



Our Collective Voices are Stronger Together



2021-22

# ABOUT RSAI

**Rural School Advocates of Iowa (RSAI)** was formed in 2014 by leaders from Iowa public school districts coming together to work collaboratively towards legislative solutions around needs and issues specific to rural public schools. While RSAI is often thought of as the association serving needs of *small* school districts, the reality is our priorities are focused on issues faced by *rural* schools, regardless of their enrollment size. Since our inception, membership has continued to grow. We invite you to become RSAI members and lend your voice to our movement for quality rural education in Iowa, because our collective voices are stronger together!

We will work to:

- **Educate** 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;
- **Build the capacity** and understanding of other groups with similar interests on legislative and educational issues to create a strong voice;
- **Share best practices** of great education programs while under the budget constraints of fewer students, how best to innovate, share and promote efficiency;
- **Secure adequate resources**, academic and financial, to provide first-class educational opportunities for students in rural communities;
- **Maintain local control** through the flexibility and authority of locally elected School Boards.

We will accomplish these goals:

- **Locally** through the advocacy of like-minded individuals and groups with our Legislators at home.
- **At the Capitol** through the services of a Professional Advocate to organize our collective voice and keep members informed.

**Our mission is to advocate for students in rural schools to assure a fair, equal and quality education.**



[www.nrea.net](http://www.nrea.net)

RSAI is Iowa's state affiliate of the National Rural Education Association and a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council.

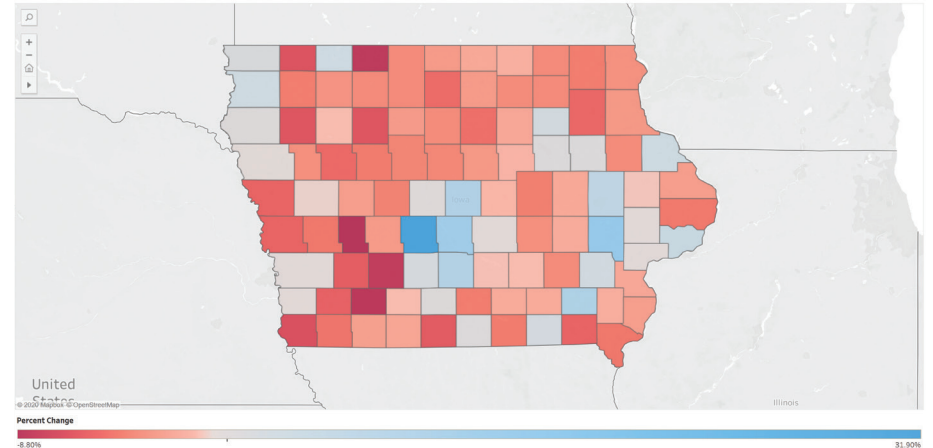
**IOWA RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
COUNCIL**

[www.iowadc.org](http://www.iowadc.org)

# RURAL TRENDS

Population Change in Iowa from 2010 to 2017

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. The color shows the percent change of population in each county, with counties having increasing population in blue and counties having decreasing population in red.



- Iowa population grew 4.3% from 2010 to 2018, trailing national growth of 5.5%, with growth primarily occurring in 16 Iowa counties. The remaining 83 counties lost 2.2% or 36,414 people. In 1980, only 15 Iowa counties had a population of less than 10,000 people. In 2019, there were 25 counties that fit that category.
- Funding of education is based on enrollment. With rural Iowa population decline, enrollment (and school funding) follows. 47 Iowa school districts in 2003-04 no longer exist. They have been reorganized or dissolved, and they were all districts serving rural communities.
- Despite demographic changes, rural school leaders remain hopeful and foster an all-hands-on-deck engagement, ready to innovate, collaborate, and invigorate staff and communities to meet every student's need.



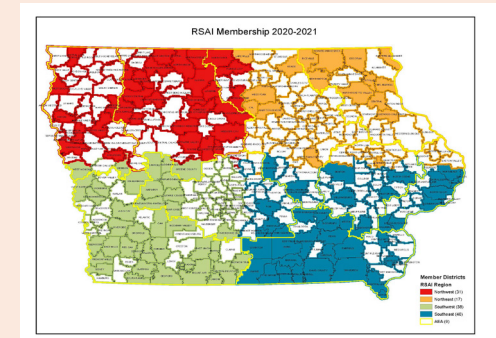
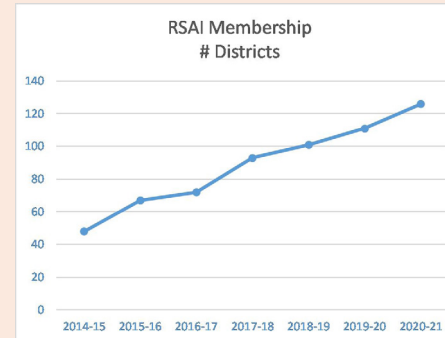
# MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

RSAI offers many benefits to member school superintendents, board members, and school districts. Below are some membership benefit highlights:

- **RSAI Legislative Priorities:** Set by a truly grassroots process.
- **Advocacy Supports:** Position Papers associated with each legislative priority to share with legislators, board members, parent/advocacy groups, or other organizations. Written and video reports on legislative actions and advocacy steps each week of the legislative session.
- **Testimony:** RSAI provides written and/or verbal testimony regarding proposed issues, rules and legislation to key legislative and executive branch decision-making bodies.
- **Representation:** RSAI Advocates, Margaret Buckton and Dave Daughton, represent RSAI member schools at the statehouse during the Legislative Session and work with the executive branch during the interim. RSAI also recruits participants for policy makers seeking rural school input.
- **Media:** RSAI engages media to connect with rural school leaders and helps inform the public and policy makers of needs of rural schools, creative approaches needed to be efficient and effective, and the amazing education rural schools deliver to Iowa students.
- **Networking:** RSAI posts media stories about rural schools across the nation and in Iowa on its website, serves as the Iowa state affiliate of the National Rural Education Association (NREA) and is a member of the Iowa Rural Development Council. NREA shares newsletters with federal actions important to rural schools, notices of grants and funding opportunities, and best practice topics of interest.
- **NASDTEC Licensure Checks:** RSAI members receive free licensure checks through the National Association of State Departments of Teacher Education and Credentials, which otherwise could cost \$100s of dollars.
- **ISFIS Support:** Iowa School Finance Information Services (ISFIS) provides RSAI association management and legislative advocate functions, maintains the website and membership database, staffs meetings, and provides communications, school finance, and legislative support services. ISFIS also provides a \$100 reduction to RSAI membership fees if schools use ISFIS Board/Policy Hosting Service.

# RSAI MEMBERS

RSAI membership is divided into four separate regions and continues to grow. Join your voices with other rural schools to strengthen rural education for Iowa students. RSAI appreciates our nine Area Education Agency partners who have all pledged support as associate members.



# RSAI WEBSITE



A plethora of advocacy supports, tools, and information for members and others interested in issues important to rural education can be found on RSAI's website. Check out our weekly RSAI Capitol Recap videos for a quick update on activities each week during the legislative session. Visit us at [www.rsaia.org](http://www.rsaia.org)

# LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

The RSAI legislative priorities are established through a grassroots effort beginning at the RSAI Regional Meetings taking place during the summer. RSAI's Legislative Committee recommends the platform for the upcoming legislative session, based on that member input, for approval by members at their Annual Meeting each October. Top Legislative Priorities from 2021 are:

- **Adequate School Resources** are critical for rural school survival. The cost per pupil increase must keep up with the economy, balance state and local funds, and be set timely to allow budget planning and staffing. The SSA rate should be set no lower than 3.75% for FY 2022.
- **Assessing and Addressing Staff/Student Social, Emotional and Behavioral Health** requires increased access and funding for children and supports for staff. In addition to funding for AEA services and other providers, an array of services should include telehealth services received at school. Providers should not pass on administrative or billing work to schools and schools should not be providers of mental health services.
- **Educator Shortage & Quality Instruction** require maximum flexibility to hire staff including strategies to attract and retain staff; flexibility to meet offer and teach requirements, loan forgiveness, a special education generalist credential, and ability to hire retirees without IPERS impact.
- **Formula and Transportation Equity** has continued to progress, with a \$145 gap. Transportation equity support should continue to reimburse high-cost districts so that none pay more than the state average per pupil transportation cost.
- **Opportunity Equity for Low SES** demands resources for at-risk students based on need while addressing the inequity of the dropout prevention cap. The formula must recognize the cost of providing equal opportunities to low income students. School districts should be granted spending authority for students' fees waived due to poverty.

Other Legislative Priorities from 2021 include:

- **Sharing Incentives and Efficiencies**
- **Quality Preschool Weighting at 1.0**
- **School Safety Investments**
- **Simple Majority for School Bonds**
- **Internet Connectivity and Access**
- **Local School Board Authority**

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

RSAI is proud of its grassroots lobbying efforts, connecting local school leaders to legislators resulting in many legislative accomplishments. Some of the recent accomplishments around rural equity, flexibility, local control and funding include:

- **More Board Authority:** through statutory home rule, locally-driven dropout prevention plans and board authority to redirect funds to needs of students, since one-size does not fit all, adding TLC to the list in 2021.
- **Transportation & Formula Equity:** funding is now incorporated in the formula and will grow by the SSA rate annually. Progress to close the district cost per pupil gap continues.
- **Operational Sharing Incentives:** expanded and extended through 2024.
- **Staff Flexibility:** CTE options for hard-to-staff content, minimize the barrier of praxis testing, local offerings of online learning, and relaxed licensure requirements allowing rural schools to better work with the staff we have to support student learning.
- **Broadband Expansion:** state investment to connect all areas to high-speed internet supporting education, telehealth, diversity of services, and a workforce that can connect virtually while enjoying a rural quality of life.



# CONTACT US



[WWW.RSAIA.ORG](http://WWW.RSAIA.ORG)

## **RURAL SCHOOL ADVOCATES OF IOWA**

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### **RSAI LEADERSHIP GROUP**

Consists of a representative from each of 4 regions across the state, plus 3 at-large representatives, each serving a 3-year term

### **RSAI LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE**

Consists of a representative from each of 4 regions across the state, each serving a 1-year term and includes the 3 at-large Leadership Group members

See the RSAI Website for current Leadership Group and Legislative Committee members and their contact information.

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