

Membership in Rural School Advocates of Iowa

Background:

Summer 2017, the Belmond-Klemme Board voted to join the organization Rural School Advocates of Iowa (RSAI). RSAI formed to collaborate and promote legislation that strengthens rural education for students. It seeks to do this by building a voice for students and educators in Iowa.

Schools in rural Iowa share some common concerns. Funding of education is based on enrollment, which has been declining in rural Iowa for many years. As enrollment declines, funding follows. Iowa population grew 6% from 2000 to 2015, trailing national growth of 15%, and primarily occurring in 15 Iowa counties. The remaining 84 counties lost 3%, or 53,000 people.

In Iowa, we have 55.2 persons per square mile compared to 85.3 persons per square mile nationwide, yet, unlike other rural states, the Iowa funding system has no acknowledgement of population sparsity, and its impact on transportation costs. 41 districts in Iowa in 2000 no longer exist. They have been reorganized or dissolved, and they were all districts serving rural communities. The challenge of attracting and retaining great teachers and staff, with many teaching positions declared "shortage areas", is even more difficult in rural communities.

The legislative priorities for RSAI are parallel to ours in Belmond-Klemme:

- Fair Transportation Equity Funding Mechanism;
- Operational Sharing Incentives Extension;
- At-Risk Funding based on need, including flexibility in how to best spend the resources;
- Quality Preschool for three- and four-year olds at 1.0 per pupil cost for up to full-day programming and transportation costs;
- Formula Equity: Raise the state cost per-pupil to the maximum district cost

Whereas we are a member of the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB), IASB represent all schools in Iowa. By the governing structure of IASB, the larger schools can have a greater influence on the political platform of IASB than small, rural schools.

A membership in RSAI includes a complementary membership in the National Rural Education Association (NREA), a national a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the interests of schools and educators in rural and sparsely-populated areas of the United States.

Recommended Action:

I recommend the board move to renew our membership in Rural School Advocates of Iowa.