



The Association
of Illinois Rural
and Small Schools

All roads lead to advocacy.

2022 Annual Report

*Association of Illinois
Rural and Small Schools*



Every President has their time, a time that makes perfect sense with their beliefs, their skill sets, their interest and their passion. Outgoing President Edwin Shoemate was the right President at the right time to lead AIRSS through a very unique time in all of our lives (a pandemic).

Dr. Jennifer Garrison is poised to lead at the right time and clearly her time to lead AIRSS. She is the quintessential rural educator and has developed a strong voice and presence in the advocacy space. There will be no stronger presence and voice for AIRSS.



Thank you Mr. Shoemate for your support and service. I look forward to standing with Dr. Garrison as we advocate for Illinois rural and small schools.

- David Ardrey



The road ahead to advocacy.

A message from the Executive Director

As I head into my 10th year working on behalf of Illinois rural and small schools and AIRSS, I look back on the 40 years of the association and consider the road ahead. As with previous annual reports my messages are all themed around “The Road” and no doubt the road we have all traveled the past 3 years is one we never expected and had no road map to help with the journey.

Looking back helps to provide clarity about the road ahead. The idea of the road going on forever can be daunting, especially regarding advocacy. What I have learned is buried within the idea of “forever.” It is about the journey, it is about the relationships along the way, it is about the work, you must show up, you must be willing to fight and know when to retreat.

There is no doubt that **all roads lead to advocacy**, and AIRSS must continue traveling with that end in mind. Board members will come and go, you will have another Executive Director (your 5th in some 40+ years), but the need for advocacy will go on forever and the journey will not end.

As an organization we have learned who we are, what we need to do and how we must approach the work. As I think about the road ahead it is clear to me that AIRSS must be the road map, that GPS signal on behalf of rural and small schools. We must have a seat at the table, sometimes we may invite ourselves, and we must show up, every time. We have established ourselves as the voice for rural and small schools and all our energy and focus must continue to be directed at that objective.

I want to thank all of you for your tireless work on behalf of Illinois rural and small schools. I am honored to serve the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools as your Director, I am proud of the work we have accomplished and I am energized about the road ahead and the work yet to be completed.

On behalf of all rural schools,

David M. Ardrey

David M. Ardrey
Executive Director, AIRSS

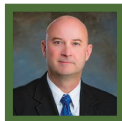


The road to leading advocacy.

Board of Directors



Mr. Edwin Shoemate
President



Dr. Steve Webb
President Emeritus



Dr. Jennifer Garrison
President Elect



Dr. Paige Maginel
Secretary



Dr. Patrick Mark Twomey
Past President

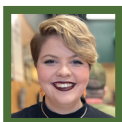


Dr. Marleis Trover
Board Member at Large

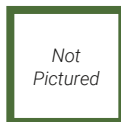
Leadership



Mr. David Ardrey
Executive Director



Ms. Hailey Winkleman
Associate Director



Ms. Jerrie A. Walters
Treasurer

Mission

The Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools shall serve as the only voice solely dedicated to the needs and concerns of small and rural schools.

Goals

ADVOCATE – To advocate for better policy and legislation to improve the quality of life (the Rural Advantage) unique to rural and small schools, all while preserving local control.

VOICE – To provide advice, counsel, and testimony to governmental agencies, private entities, members of the Illinois General Assembly, the Executive branch, and federal legislators on all matters concerning education in rural and small schools.

ACCESS – To elevate teachers and students access to high quality educational opportunities in all Illinois rural and small schools.



The road to financing advocacy.

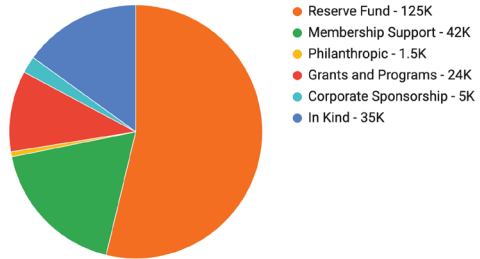
Financial Report

Here are a series of charts that represent the financial projections and realities as they relate to the AIRSS budget. As the process continues to improve the organization as a whole and specifically our financial strategies, these charts represent the conceptual percentages to operate the organization in a conservative and fiscally prudent manner.

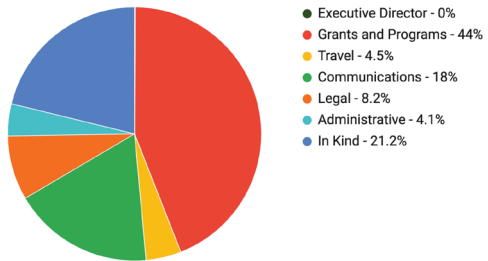
Our budgeting process is guided by three specific principles. The first is to develop a conservative approach to our income and expense strategies, one that reflects the values of the membership. Secondly, to create a stable revenue stream that does not rely on only one source but is spread out equally among various sources. Thirdly, to create a strong revenue line of internal investment (reserve fund) to sustain the organization.

AIRSS will continue to look for growth opportunities while remaining focused on our guiding fiscal principles.

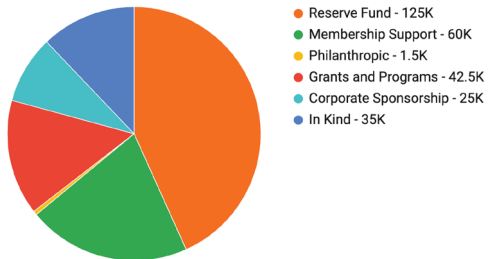
CY22 Actual Income



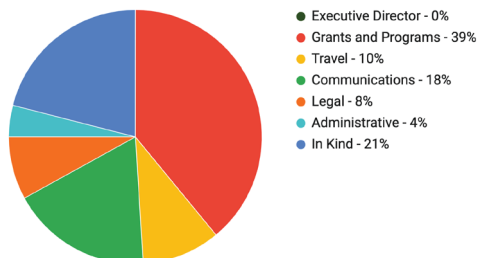
CY22 Actual Expenses



CY23 Projected Income



CY23 Projected Expenses



The road to recognizing advocacy.

Past AIRSS leadership



Mr. Gary DePatis

Gary DePatis is a retiring board member and past President of the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools retired from Virginia CUSD 64 in May 2022. Gary's career spanned 33 years, starting at Cass County Beardstown, with stops in Schuyler County Rushville, Havana, Greenview CUSD, Morrisonville and ending a long and distinguished career at Virginia.

Gary's passion and care for rural and small schools has always been at the forefront of his personal life and professional career. That passion carried him through his advanced degrees and his work and research on rural schools starting in 2004. His academic work and research (with

his research partners Tami Roskamp and former AIRSS board member Dr. Mary Parker) has been presented throughout the country including the National Rural Education Association national conference and research symposium in 2011 and 2013.

For as long as anyone can remember Gary has been a part of AIRSS and contributed serving as a board member, officer, on numerous committees and ultimately serving as President in 2007-08. In 2011 it was Gary that pushed for AIRSS visibility to make its first appearance at the Triple I and IASA exhibit halls.

Says Dave Ardrey, Executive Director of AIRSS, "In 2013 at the National Rural Education Association conference, it was Gary that said, 'I want to talk to you about AIRSS and how you might be involved.' The rest is history, and I am honored to carry on the legacy Gary established around rural schools."

The board and members of AIRSS consider it an honor and privilege to congratulate Mr. Gary DePatis on his long and honorable career and his long



Dr. Michael Curry

Dr. Mike Curry graduated from Jacksonville High School in 1988 and Western Illinois University in 1992. He began his educational career as a junior high social studies teacher and coach in Beardstown, IL.

He later had stops at Pana High School, Taylorville High School, Athens High School, all as Principal. In 2011 Dr. Curry became the Superintendent at VIT School District in Table Grove, IL. In July of 2017 Dr. Curry accepted the position of Superintendent at Abingdon-Avon CUSD#276.

Throughout his career Dr. Curry continued his education completing his Masters degree in Educational Administration and

a Education Specialist degree from Eastern Illinois University. He went on the complete his Doctorate degree at Western Illinois University in 2016.

Dr. Curry has devoted his career to rural schools and spent two years studying the rural leadership position of superintendent/principal. He began attending the AIRSS annual meeting for three years and had voiced his willingness to “serve an organization that serves rural school districts at the state and national level” and serve he did.

We are grateful for Mike’s service to the AIRSS board of directors, his commitment to rural and small schools has been a labor of love and commitment. Dr. Curry chose to step down in mid 2022 after his decision to take a new position at Decatur Public Schools outside of the rural spectrum. We wish him well and hope he returns to his rural roots someday.



Mr. Andrew Sisulak (in memoriam, 1962 - 2022)

On April 9th, 2022, Andy Sisulak suddenly passed away at his home in Carbondale. If you met Andy, he likely provided a warm hello and handshake, a good story, and a beverage in your hand. In many ways, Andy was the outward face of rural and small schools. We (AIRSS) were lucky to have Andy on our side, as a part of our team and for many of us privileged to call him friend.

The AIRSS Board of Directors and all its members send our deepest sympathies and prayers to the Sisulak family. We share your grief and hold on to all the memories.

The road to grassroots advocacy.

Organizations we regularly engage with

The work of advocacy is mostly done in the background out of a public-facing presence. It is accomplished through emails, meetings, conference calls, and now endless Zoom meetings with interested parties and stakeholders present for the conversation and agenda. The work can be engaging, pertinent and sometimes mundane, but always noticed if you are not present.

It is quite possibly the most important lesson learned for AIRSS in the advocacy workspace, you must SHOW UP. Over the past 6 years, AIRSS's philosophy has been, "we will meet with anyone, anytime, anywhere." The anywhere is always a challenge by virtue of the geography of the state, however, Zoom changed that dynamic. The list below represents some, but not all, of the groups, organizations, and individuals AIRSS meets with on a weekly, monthly and periodic basis.

AIRSS is a small organizational structure, and we need all members to advocate for rural schools. Please consider becoming involved in the process of advocacy by serving on a task force or stakeholder group, and attending meetings or webinars. Remember we must show up!

Advance Illinois

**American Institutes for Research
(Region 9)**

**Committee for Education Funding
(CEF)**

EBF Spending Plan Advisory Group

**Delta School Design Learning/
Thinking**

Evil Eye Creative Studio

Governors Rural Affairs Council

**Homeland Security Information
Network**

**IL Association for Supervision and
Curriculum Development (ILASCD)**

IL State Board of Education (ISBE)

**ISBE/AIRSS Rural Education
Advisory Panel**

Lead|ED

**National Center for Teacher
Residencies (NCTR)**

**National Rural Education Advocacy
Coalition (NREAC)**

NREA Executive Committee

**Organizations Concerned about
Rural Education (OCRE)**

The P-3 Group

Rural Residency Grant (WIU)

Turing Strategies

U.S. Department of Education

United States Census Bureau

**Western Illinois University Center
for Rural Education**

White House Briefings

The road to partner advocacy.

Our Partners

AIRSS partners support the goals of the organization in various ways. The Association is thankful for this external network of advocates that strengthen the visibility and mission of AIRSS.



Partner Feature - Western Illinois University

The Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools and Western Illinois University are forever linked by a long road of history and longevity. Dating back to the early 1980's WIU supported AIRSS beginnings by supplying its first Executive Director Robert G. Rogers and its first office in Horrabin Hall. Through the years others like Dr. Sandra Watkins, Dr. Steve Breckon and Dr. Greg Montalvo carried the AIRSS/ WIU relationship.

Fast forward to today, the opportunity to strengthen the AIRSS/WIU relationship is greater than ever. With individuals like Dr. Eric Sheffield, Interim Dean Katrina Datner, Dr. Denny Barr and others, Western's extraordinary commitment to focus on rural schools and issues, and with the development of the Seymour Center for Rural Education a stronger and even more robust partnership is in the making.

We (AIRSS) are excited to be a part of the rural movement at WIU, we look forward to supporting the work and are committed to a strong and vibrant partnership in the years to come. Stay tuned for more to come as the work evolves with AIRSS and WIU.



The road to Illinois advocacy.

House Bill / Senate Bill 1819



HB/SB 1819

*Rural Education
Advisory Council*

To date, the most important work AIRSS has done is the development of the Rural Education Advisory Council concept and the subsequent push to pass legislation to cement a place for rural schools' voices to be heard within the Illinois State Board of Education.

In 2019 AIRSS began working with various stakeholders and policy makers to develop the concept and ultimately write legislation for what would come to be known as the Rural Education Advisory Council. With support from then Senator Andy Manar, Representative Avery Bourne, and others, a final draft of language was agreed upon.

On February 4, 2021, with the support of Representative Sue Scherer as Chief Sponsor, HB1819 was filed on behalf of AIRSS to enact the Rural Education Advisory Council. Subsequent to this on February 26, 2021, with support from Chief Sponsor Senator Dave Koelher, SB1819 was filed.

Embedded below is a chart you will see the various stages and actions that have taken place on the bill within the general assembly. What is not seen is the tremendous amount of work and ongoing negotiations that occurred behind the scenes to keep this bill alive. HB/SB 1819 had early success and support and received attention throughout the state, and for that matter the country.

Summary of Actions in the House

Date	Chamber	Action
2/16/2021	House	Filed with the Clerk by Rep. Sue Scherer
2/17/2021	House	First Reading
2/17/2021	House	Referred to Rules Committee
3/9/2021	House	Assigned to Elementary & Secondary Education: Administration, Licensing & Charter Schools
3/17/2021	House	House Committee Amendment No. 1 Filed with Clerk by Rep. Sue Scherer
3/17/2021	House	House Committee Amendment No. 1 Referred to Rules Committee
3/17/2021	House	Added Co-Sponsor Rep. Avery Bourne
3/17/2021	House	Do Pass / Short Debate Elementary & Secondary Education: Administration, Licensing & Charter Schools: 008-000-000
3/18/2021	House	Placed on Calendar 2nd Reading - Short Debate
3/18/2021	House	House Committee Amendment No. 1 Tabled Pursuant to Rule 40
3/23/2021	House	House Floor Amendment No. 2 Filed with Clerk by Rep. Sue Scherer
3/23/2021	House	House Floor Amendment No. 2 Referred to Rules Committee
4/6/2021	House	House Floor Amendment No. 2 Rules Refers to Elementary & Secondary Education: Administration, Licensing & Charter Schools
4/13/2021	House	Added Co-Sponsor Rep. Chris Miller
4/21/2021	House	Second Reading - Short Debate
4/21/2021	House	Held on Calendar Order of Second Reading - Short Debate
4/23/2021	House	Rule 19(a) / Re-referred to Rules Committee
4/23/2021	House	House Floor Amendment No. 2 Rule 19(c) / Re-referred to Rules Committee

Summary of Actions in the Senate

Date	Chamber	Action
2/26/2021	Senate	Filed with Secretary by Sen. David Koelher
2/26/2021	Senate	First Reading
2/26/2021	Senate	Referred to Assignments
3/9/2021	Senate	Assigned to Education
3/9/2021	Senate	Added as Co-Sponsor Sen. Scott M. Bennett
3/10/2021	Senate	Added as Co-Sponsor Sen. Patrick J. Joyce
3/10/2021	Senate	Added as Chief Co-Sponsor Sen. Karina Villa
3/16/2021	Senate	Postponed - Education
3/24/2021	Senate	Do Pass Education: 014-000-000
3/24/2021	Senate	Placed on Calendar Order of 2nd Reading March 25, 2021
3/24/2021	Senate	Senate Floor Amendment No. 1 Filed with Secretary by Sen. David Koelher
3/24/2021	Senate	Senate Floor Amendment No. 1 Referred to Assignments
4/7/2021	Senate	Senate Floor Amendment No. 1 Assignments Refers to Education
4/14/2021	Senate	Senate Floor Amendment No. 1 Recommend Do Adopt Education: 013-000-000
4/20/2021	Senate	Added as Co-Sponsor Sen. Rachelle Crowe
4/23/2021	Senate	Rule 2-10 Third Reading Deadline Established As April 30, 2021
4/27/2021	Senate	Senate Floor Amendment No. 1 Adopted; Koelher
4/27/2021	Senate	Second Reading
4/27/2021	Senate	Placed on Calendar Order of 3rd Reading April 28, 2021
4/30/2021	Senate	Rule 2-10 Third Reading Deadline Established As May 7, 2021
5/7/2021	Senate	Rule 3-9(a) / Re-referred to Assignments

The bill eventually stalled due to opposition from within ISBE and a number of requests were made that AIRSS work with the agency to find the right fit, plan and language to create a pathway for a legitimate voice for rural schools within the state agency.

As an Association we have done everything that has been asked of us, we have participated when asked, we have shown up, and at every step along the way made every attempt to bring value to the conversation.

The process has been lengthy, a journey that has now solidified the need for legislation to ensure rural and small schools have a seat at the table and voice within the agency. This type of council exists in other states and has had bi-partisan support and positive outcomes on behalf of rural schools. We intend to continue the road to advocacy with HB/SB 1819.



View the Bill

Scan this QR code with your phone's camera to view the full bill online, or visit bit.ly/hbsb1819.

A message from Dr. Ernesto Matias, Chief Education Officer - ISBE

As ISBE continued to work on our statewide equity lens, we had the privilege of meeting with the Rural Advisory Panel on a consistent basis.

Under Dr. Ayala's leadership, ISBE developed an internal Impact Analysis tool to guide our statewide proposals. This Impact Analysis tool has six questions that we must ask before submitting any proposals for approval. The main purpose of our meetings with the Rural Advisory Panel was to gain a better understanding of equity from a rural perspective.

During our bi-weekly meetings, we listened to ideas on how to support our rural districts and communities. One of the outcomes of these meetings was that we were able to invite David Ardrey and two rural district Superintendents to share-out their unique individual challenges from an equity perspective to our ISBE Education Executive Directors. Our Executive Directors were given the opportunities to ask questions and learn about rural communities. Another example of the impact of this collaboration was the Teacher Residency grant. The Teacher Residency RFP awarded bonus points if applicants were from rural communities. The third round of grants for the CTE Education Career Pathways prioritized rural and low-income areas.

I believe that the collaboration has been very productive in deepening our understanding of equity from a rural perspective. As we continue to meet, I expect that we may find ways to strengthen our relationships, and deepen our understanding from an equity perspective to better support our rural districts.

These are just some of the ways the ISBE's Impact Equity Tool is helping us meet the needs of our rural districts.

Dr. Ernesto Matias

Dr. Ernesto Matias, Chief Education Officer, ISBE



The road to teacher advocacy.

Teacher Feature - Vinnie Rivera, McLeansboro, IL

The following excerpt is from a story shared by our friends at Rural Schools Collaborative as part of their I Am A Rural Teacher project. Please view the full story on their website.

Vinnie Rivera didn't grow up in a rural place, but he is no stranger to small town life. He had thought about being a teacher before, but it took some persuasion and guidance from the mentors in his life to finally pursue teaching as a career.

"When I went to college the first time, I initially went to be a teacher. By the time I graduated, I didn't have an education degree and I had convinced myself that I didn't want to be a teacher. My mentor, Hector Hernandez, encouraged me to apply for a tutoring job at the school that he worked at, so I did. Within one hour I felt so much regret. I got there and I got to working with students and I was like - 'This is what you should do, this is what you should do.'"

Relationships continue to be a focal point for Vinnie, especially in his classroom. The bonds forged between himself, his band members, and his community are integral to the music program's success. On the other hand, a lack of funding and resources can pose a particular challenge to arts programs in rural places.

Still, he remains optimistic:

"At the end of the day, it's still band. Whether it's band in a big town, or band in a small town, it's still band. And if there's one thing in this life I know how to do, I know how to do band."

Read Vinnie's full story and other Illinois teacher stories at iamaruralteacher.org!





The road to national advocacy.

A message from Dr. Allen Pratt, Executive Director of the National Rural Education Association

The National Rural Education Association (NREA) is a collection of state affiliate members and rural stakeholders that represent a unified voice for all rural schools and communities in the United States. The Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools (AIRSS) is a living example of this connection. AIRSS's initial involvement dates back to the late 1980's and has maintained an active role in NREA and its organization since the late 1990's.

Executive Director David Ardrey and the AIRSS board lead by example in Illinois in support of the NREA and help move the rural needle forward at the national level. We could not be successful if we did not have state affiliate support.

The NREA regularly elects members and state directors to rank positions on our Executive Committee. David Ardrey has served as an at-large member since 2016, and in 2019 he was elected President-Elect Designee. Beginning October 2022, Mr. Ardrey will serve as the President of NREA and serve on the executive committee until 2024. He has been a very active participant in growing our organization during his time with AIRSS and the NREA.

As a part of the NREA advocacy work, the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition (NREAC) exists to promote the growth of our national, state, and local policy and legislative advocacy work. Mr. Ardrey has led the way on many issues and topics on behalf of the NREAC. One of those important issues has been his work on the funding and oversight of the federal REAP program. His support has been invaluable to this issue.

Thank you to Executive Director Ardrey, to AIRSS, its members and leaders for making NREA a better organization!

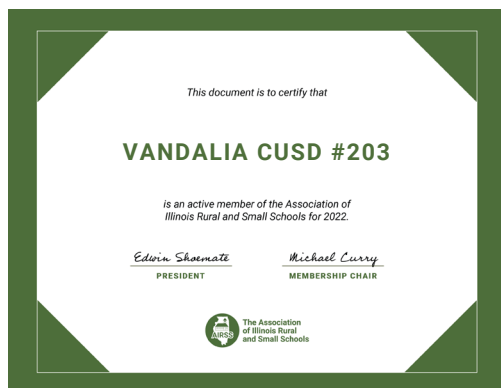
Dr. Allen Pratt

Dr. Allen Pratt, Executive Director, NREA



The road to supporting advocacy.

Our Membership



Member involvement is the lifeblood of AIRSS, member support is the lifeline.

For AIRSS to be successful on the roads to advocacy, we need all rural schools to support the work on your behalf. They are watching to see if we will coalesce around a common bond and continue to be the VOICE for rural schools. Policy makers are watching, pundits are criticizing, and lawmakers are

always counting votes. We have learned the past two years it takes all of us working together in concert to move the complex Illinois education system forward.

Our rural schools, communities, and families deserve better and should not accept anything less than the same educational access and opportunities our urban and suburban counterparts are afforded. We have lots of work to do and much to still accomplish, and we need your help.

The map on the back of this report shows the location of all 500+ rural and small schools and our 300+ REAP eligible schools. AIRSS's goal and focus is that each dot becomes a supporting member. Thank you for a great 2022 - help us make 2023 our strongest year of member support yet!

Your membership support at work in advocacy and policy:

- If you are a REAP Eligible School, AIRSS is constantly advocating with the U.S. Dept. of Education on your behalf.
- If you are below EBF Adequacy, especially those below 70%, AIRSS is a strong voice and advocate for improved funding for our rural schools.
- If you are experiencing a teacher shortage, AIRSS is engaged in constant conversation with ISBE to provide support for an intentionally designed pathway to prepare rural educators.
- If you believe that all children should receive equitable per pupil school funding and rural children should be valued as equal, your membership supports this premise and the work.

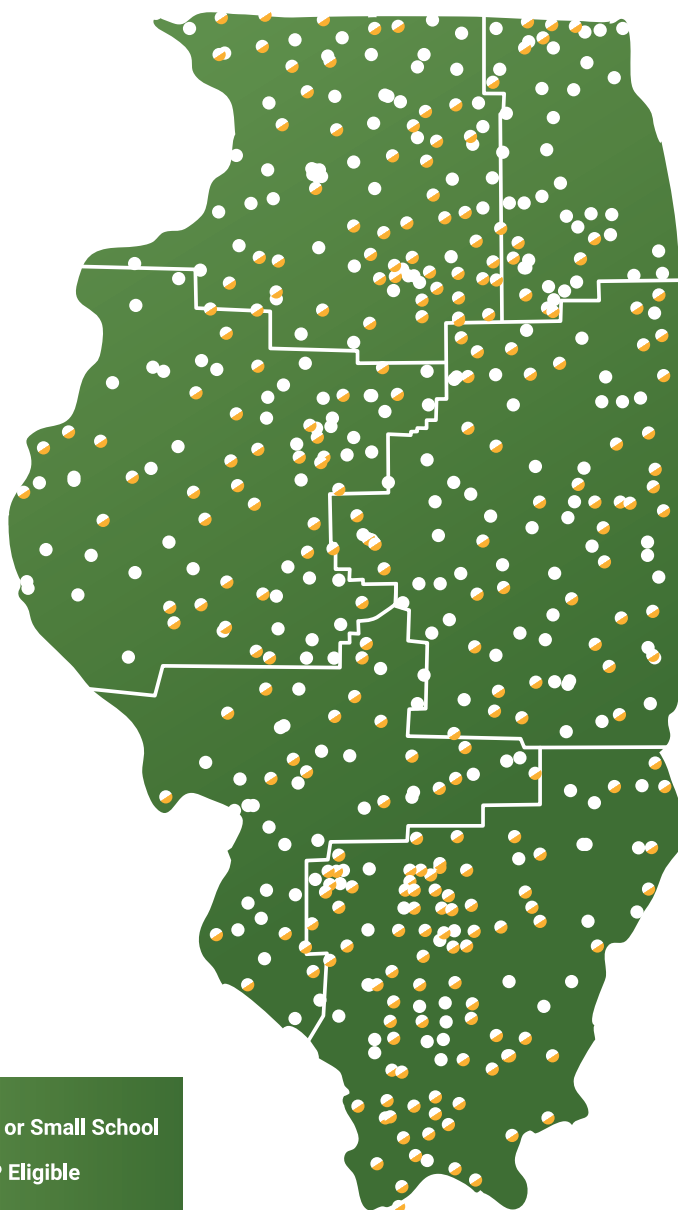
Thank you to our 2022 supporting members!



Abingdon-Avon CUSD #276
Altamont CUSD #10
Alwood CUSD #225
Astoria CUSD #1
Bond County CUSD #2
Brimfield CUSD #309
Brownstown CUSD #201
Bunker Hill School District #8
Bushnell-Prairie City School District
Byron CUSD #226
Carthage ESD #317
Central A & M CUSD #21
Centralia HSD #200
Century CUSD #100
Cerro Gordo CUSD #100
Christopher Unit School District #99
Cobden Unit School District #17
Community Unit School District #4
CUSD #3 Fulton County
Dallas Elementary #327
Dieterich Community Unit #30
Dongola USD #66
Dr. Brent McArdle
Dr. Marleis Trover
East Coloma-Nelson CESD #20
Elverado CUSD #196
Erie CUSD #1
Fairfield PSD #112
Farmington Central CUSD #265
Fieldcrest CUSD #6
Frankfort CUSD #168
Geneseo CUSD #228
Georgetown - Ridge Farm District #4
Goreville CUSD #1
Goreville CUSD #1
Grass Lake School District #36
Greenfield CUSD #10
Harrisburg Unit #3 Schools
Henry-Senachwine CUSD #5
Hiawatha CUSD #426
Illini Bluffs CUSD #327
Jonesboro CUSD #43
LaHarpe CSD #347
LaSalle-Peru Township HSD #120
Lena-Winslow CUSD #202
Lexington CUSD #7

Lick Creek CUSD #16
Lowpoint-Washburn CUSD #21
Macomb C.U.S.D. #185
Marissa CUSD #40
Mercer County School District #404
Momence CSD #1
Monmouth-Roseville CUSD #238
Mt. Pulaski CUSD #23
Nauvoo-Colusa CUSD #325
New Simpson Hill CSD #32
Nokomis Community Unit #22
Norris City-Omaha-Enfield CUSD #3
North Mac CUSD #34
Orion CUSD #223
Pana CUSD #8
Panhandle CUSD
Prairie Central CUSD #8
Prairieview Ogden CCSD #197
Princeville CUSD #326
Red Bud CUSD #132
Roanoke-Benson CUSD #60
Rooks Creek CCSD #425
Rossville-Alvin CUSD #7
Scales Mound CUD #211
Shawnee CUSD #84
Shelbyville CUSD #4
Shiloh CUSD #1
South Central CUSD #401
South Fork School District #14
Sparta CUSD #140
Spoon River Valley District #4
St. Rose Elem. SD #14-15
Tri-Point CUSD 6J
Trico CUSD #176
Triopia CUSD #27
Union School District #81
Unity Point School District #140
Vandalia CUSD #203
Vienna HSD #133
Vienna PSD #55
Virginia CUSD #64
Warsaw CUSD #316
Waverly CUSD #16
Western CUSD #12
Williamsfield CUSD #210
Williamsville CUSD #15

Map of Illinois Rural and Small Schools

within the 6 IARSS Service Areas



-  Rural or Small School
-  REAP Eligible