



## 2023 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

**The NREAC, representing a coalition of states in federal education policy, supports the following positions and calls upon the Congress to fund public schools in a manner that protects and increases overall investments in education.**

### **FOCUS ON RURAL SCHOOLS AND FUNDING**

NREAC calls on the Federal Government to revise the poverty indicators within education programs to recognize the unique challenges in rural communities.

NREAC urges Congress to maintain formula grants to provide a more reliable stream of funding to local school districts. NREAC requests that Congress fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): By honoring the commitment to support the education of students with disabilities, Congress will enable districts to shift dollars toward new initiatives that address their local needs.

NREAC supports investments in the Secure Rural Schools Programs (SRS) that provides critical funding for districts impacted by federal lands. We support the efforts of the USDA and Forest Service to protect and enhance our communities but not at the expense of a district's ability to support its programs.

- NREAC supports long-term dedicated SRS funding for 5-10 years and retroactive appropriations to ensure no disruption in funding.

NREAC supports an increased annual investment in Title II, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants, which is critical for ongoing educator development and training needs to ensure educators have the professional knowledge necessary to adjust their teaching to changing learning environments stemming from the pandemic.

- Establishing a commission to address the long-standing educator shortage exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Support efforts addressing student learning loss through deployment of support teachers and tutors.

NREAC urges Congress to increase funding to Title V, Part B of ESSA, the Rural Education Achievement Program, with a specific increase to the Rural Low-Income School program.

- Moreover, NREAC supports an examination of RLIS data to determine the impact of changing the poverty metric used to determine the overall allocation of program dollars.
- NREAC believes any competitive funds slated for a 'rural set-aside' or 'rural-only' competition should instead be directed to the Rural Education Achievement Program, a proven formula program that supports rural school innovation. If competitive funds must exist, these competitive funds should cover the cost associated with grant application and management expenses for rural communities.

NREAC supports significant investment in Title I of ESSA that supports districts with high concentrations of poverty. Furthermore, the NREAC requests that the Title I formulas, which are used as the basis for distributing other federal funds, be examined to account for small, rural districts that may fall below the Basic Grant requirements of 10 students.

NREAC opposes efforts to privatize or redirect federal funds to private schools, voucher programs, attempts to incentivize federal tax credits for donations to private schools, and proposals to create educational savings accounts for students.





## HIGHER EDUCATION INVESTMENTS

NREAC supports the preservation and expansion of federal grant and loan forgiveness programs that support teachers and other school personnel, especially those that encourage individuals to work in rural districts and communities.

To address regional teacher shortages, adapt the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant Program to explicitly incentivize teacher education graduates to work in rural schools.

NREAC supports increased funding to the Teacher Quality Partnership grant program, the only federal initiative dedicated to strengthening and reforming educator preparation at institutions of higher education and opposes the elimination of the program or cuts to its funding.

NREAC supports the preservation and increased funding for TRIO programs so it can better serve students in rural schools.

To leverage rural public colleges and improve rural public health: 1) establish teaching health clinics and hospitals at rural public colleges; 2) strengthen partnerships with area healthcare providers to train healthcare professionals; and 3) provide loan forgiveness for graduates of health science programs who work in rural communities.

## FOCUS ON RURAL SCHOOLS AT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NREAC requests that the U.S. Department of Education consider the needs and capacity of rural schools when proposing new regulations, guidance, and technical assistance, and to ensure that any regulations issued are consistent with the spirit and scope of the law.

NREAC urges the U.S. Department of Education to consider the administrative burden of data collection on rural districts. Specifically, the Department should exempt rural school districts from annually responding to the Civil Rights Data Collection and return to a sampling methodology that ensured they were not submitting data annually.

NREAC recommends that the U.S. Department of Education create an Office of Rural Education Policy to ensure policies, programs and funding streams consider the capacity of rural schools.

NREAC urges the Department to simplify and amend competitive grant application processes to ensure all districts are notified of opportunities and capable of applying.

## EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

NREAC believes access to high-speed internet is critical for providing equitable access to learning for students in rural schools. As such, NREAC strongly supports maintaining E-Rate as an element of the Universal Service Fund in its current funding structure. Moreover, NREAC supports increased flexibilities for the allowable uses of E-rate to enable rural schools to utilize education technology that best meets the needs of their communities.

NREAC supports efforts at the federal level to address the digital divide through expanded access to connectivity at home: including efforts to improve infrastructure for broadband access and increased bandwidth, as well as incentives for providers to continue to expand connectivity options in hard-to-reach or high-cost areas.

NREAC supports a continued investment in the Emergency Connectivity Fund to provide students and staff access to the critical devices and high-speed internet at home necessary for academic success.





### **SAFE AND HEALTHY SCHOOLS**

NREAC supports flexible federal formula funding streams that channel resources to rural school districts for school safety that recognizes the geographic and economic challenges in rural communities.

NREAC believes Congress must provide sustained funding to address the increasing mental health needs of students, staff and families in rural areas including incentivizing the exploration and expansion of teletherapy in rural schools.

NREAC supports efforts to ensure any infrastructure proposal in Congress must include funding for modernizing or maintaining rural school facilities.

### **SCHOOL NUTRITION**

NREAC believes providing free meals for all students is a proven strategy to reduce food insecurity, support learning, improve mental and physical health, and bolster educational and economic equity.

NREAC supports reimbursing schools when federal food service requirements result in loss of revenue.

NREAC supports any effort to streamline processes and reduce the administrative burdens related to school meal programs.

### **OTHER PRIORITIES**

NREAC supports a greater federal investment in early education through the coordination and support of new and already existing school-based and community partnerships.

NREAC supports flexibility for state and local education agencies to expand, revise, and modify school academic calendars to best address student needs. At the local level this could include, but is not limited to, extended day, broader access to summer learning, expanded integration of online learning, and year-round school, among others.

NREAC supports increased federal investment in rural education research, as well as a focus on the central challenges facing rural communities.

NREAC supports increased funding and access to career and technical education (CTE) in high school and post-secondary programs.

- Increase access to high-quality CTE teacher preparation and professional development.
- Makes common-sense laws to incentivize interstate teacher licensure reciprocity.

NREAC supports the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the National Apprenticeship Act. WIOA Increases the availability of services and supports in schools so students have access to youth apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. NREAC supports funding to support WIOA infrastructure costs.

NREAC calls upon Congress to increase funds for the Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC) initiative.

