

NREAC 2019 Legislative Agenda

For 2019, NREAC identified the following major federal advocacy priorities:

1. Preserve critical federal funding for rural schools
2. Expand and improve federal programs to address teacher shortages in rural communities
3. Fully fund IDEA
4. Protect rural schools from privatization schemes

Funding for Rural Schools

- NREAC urges Congress to maintain formula grants to provide a more reliable stream of funding to local school districts.
- NREAC supports a federal role that prioritizes investment in IDEA and Title I, recognizing them as the federal flagship initiatives. In light of the failure of federal and state governments to maintain special education funding, districts should be provided greater flexibility to meet the needs of all students.
- NREAC opposes unfunded mandates from the Administration or Congress.
- 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.
- NREAC opposes any across-the-board cuts and the elimination of key education programs.
- NREAC urges Congress to maintain other critical funding streams for rural schools. In particular, REAP, Title II Part A, 21st Century grants, Perkins CTE, E-Rate, RELs, must continue at a minimum of FY18 levels.
- NREAC supports the reauthorization and re-funding of the Secure Rural Schools program on a permanent basis.

Priorities for the Higher Education Act Reauthorization

- NREAC supports the preservation and expansion of federal grant and loan forgiveness programs that support teachers, especially those that encourage teachers to work in rural districts
- NREAC supports efforts at the federal level to assist rural districts in recruiting and retaining teachers and school personnel in hard to staff positions through loan forgiveness programs targeted at rural communities and districts
- NREAC supports 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
- Preserve the TRIO program and ensuring it can better serve students in rural schools

Focus on Rural Schools at The U.S. Department of Education

- NREAC demands that the U.S. Department release the Congressionally mandated Title I formula report, which was due in June 2017 and is now nearly two years past-due.
- NREAC requests that the U.S. Department of Education should take care to 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.

Efforts to privatize or redirect federal funds to private schools

- NREAC opposes the Educational Freedom Scholarship and Opportunity Act
- NREAC opposes any voucher program for military-connected children
- NREAC opposes the reauthorization of the D.C. voucher program, any attempt to incentivize federal tax credits for donations to private schools and any efforts to create educational savings accounts for students.
- NREAC questions efforts in Congress to spend limited federal resources on private schools.

Education Technology

- NREAC strongly supports maintaining E-Rate as an element of the Universal Service Fund.
- NREAC supports efforts at the federal level to address the homework gap through expanded access to connectivity at home.
- NREAC supports efforts to improve infrastructure for broadband access and increased bandwidth, including conversations related to incentivizing providers to continue to expand connectivity options in hard-to-reach or high-cost areas.
- NREAC believes access to high speed internet is critical for providing equitable access to learning for students in rural schools.

Safe and Healthy Schools

- NREAC strongly supports efforts to streamline the paperwork associated with Medicaid claiming as it disproportionately hinders small and rural districts from participating in the Medicaid program and providing critical health and mental health services to children.
- NREAC supports flexible federal formula funding streams to channel resources to rural school districts for school safety that recognize the unique safety needs of each community and school
- NREAC believes all school districts have a responsibility to maintain a safe and healthy learning environment for students, but geographic and economic challenges in rural communities make this reality more difficult.
- NREAC believes Congress must provide sustained funding to address the increasing mental health needs of children in rural areas including incentivizing the exploration and expansion of teletherapy in rural schools.

School Nutrition

- NREAC supports reimbursing schools when federal food service requirements result in loss of revenue.
- NREAC recommends giving districts the option to waive out of unfunded federal food service requirements.
- NREAC believes all licensing and certification requirements for school nutrition workers are a state responsibility.
- NREAC opposes efforts to increase the administrative burden around eligibility for free and reduced lunch verification
- NREAC supports the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm to Table Program.
- NREAC does not support changes made to the Community Eligibility Provision eligibility threshold.
- NREAC supports an increase in reimbursement for the national school lunch and school breakfast programs.
- NREAC opposes any attempts at turning school nutrition funding into a block grant or consolidated funding stream.

Other Priorities

- NREAC supports efforts to ensure Qualified Zone Academy Bonds are readily available to rural schools and that rural schools are included in any infrastructure package. Any infrastructure proposal in Congress must include funding for modernizing or maintaining rural school facilities.
- NREAC supports a greater federal investment in early education through the coordination and support of new and already existing school-based and community partnerships.