



DEVELOPMENTS IN FEDERAL RURAL EDUCATION POLICY & RESEARCH April 2014

Bills in the US House and Senate

Note: No new legislation affecting rural education has been introduced since March 2014; the below includes some background information on 2013 legislation that gives a sense of the issues that have been raised.

No Action Since Previous Update:

H.R. 3886 To amend the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRSCSDA) of 2000

02/12/14 Referred to Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy, and Forestry

Sponsor: Representative Peter DeFazio, D – OR

Existing text of [SRSCSDA](#)

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

Would exempt payments made to states and counties under the act from reductions under sequestration and would reimburse those states that returned part of their January 2013 payment when sequestration began.

H.R. 1736 School Principal Recruitment and Training Act

07/8/13 Referred to Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

Sponsor: Representative Susan Davis, D – CA

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

Would award renewable, matching grants to states and LEAs—in partnership with nonprofit organizations or institutions of higher education—to create a principal training and support programs for eligible schools. These schools include “high-need schools, persistently low-achieving schools, achievement gap schools, schools with middle grades that feed to high schools with low graduation rates, and rural schools served by high-need LEAs.”

Past Bills Affecting Rural Education

S. 1222 Rural Education Achievement Program Reauthorization Act of 2013

06/25/2013 Read twice

Referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Sponsor: Senator Susan Collins, R – ME

Co-Sponsor: Senator Max Baucus, D – MT

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

This bill limits eligibility for the Small Rural School Achievement program (SRSA) to LEAs in which the National Center for Education Statistics designates all schools as Rural-Fringe, Rural-Distant, or Rural-Remote—unless located in an area the *state* defines as rural. These changes could simplify the eligibility criteria for the SRSA program dramatically by removing existing population density-based eligibility requirements and replacing them with school locale codes.

The bill also changes LEA eligibility for the Rural and Low-Income School Program (RLIS). Eligibility for RLIS is currently determined by locale codes and by the percentage of children served by the LEA with incomes below the poverty line. This legislation maintains the requirement for rural locale codes but replaces the poverty line threshold with eligibility for free- or reduced-price lunch.

The proposed change to RLIS could 1) reduce the compliance burden for the RLIS program by tying eligibility to information schools already collect (school lunch eligibility) rather than the federal poverty line and 2) increase the number of schools eligible for the program, as school lunch eligibility starts at 130 percent of the federal poverty line.

S.1096 Office of Rural Education Policy Act

06/04/2013 Read twice

Referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Sponsor: Senator Max Baucus, D – MT

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

This bill would create an Office of Rural Education Policy within the US Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. It would require the Office to be led by a Director who would advise the Secretary of Education on the characteristics and needs of rural schools as well as the effects that current and proposed regulatory, statutory, administrative, and budgetary changes could have on states and/or LEAs that serve rural schools. This includes preparing regulatory impact analyses of the Secretary's proposed and final rules that may affect states or LEAs that serve rural schools.

An Office of Rural Education Policy would provide a central hub for rural policy and programs within the Department of Education. Just as important, however, the Office would also be responsible for considering the impact of general policies, programs, statutory changes, and budget decisions on rural schools. This could help move the Department away from "one size fits all" policies as well as those tailored to the challenges faced by urban schools and help move towards programs and solutions created to meet the unique needs of rural schools.

S. 439 Career and Technical Education Facilities Modernization Act

03/04/2013 Read twice

Referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Sponsor: Senator Mark Begich, D – AK

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

This bill amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to direct the Secretary of Education to provide grants or loan guarantees for LEAs, community colleges, and other appropriate entities in the modernization, repair, or renovation of facilities that provide career

and technical education or science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education. It requires that at least 25 percent of funding from this program is used to support LEAs eligible to receive assistance under the ESEA Rural Education Initiative Program or community colleges that have a substantial number of rural students.

This legislation could help rural communities combat “brain drain.” Andrew Koricich, assistant professor of education at Texas Tech, recently predicted that rural areas will soon be the center of the green economy. Improved facilities could help community colleges provide training to rural residents to work in these industries, which may incentivize rural residents to stay and incentivize companies to locate in these areas.

Funding Opportunities for Rural Schools

USDA Farm to School Grants FY 2015 – Request for Proposals

[USDA Farm to School Grant Program](#)

The USDA Farm to School Grant Program helps implement farm to school programs that improve access to local foods. The USDA awards up to \$5 million annually in competitive grants for training, operations support, equipment, school garden development, partnership development, and the implementation of farm to school programs. In fiscal year 2015, an additional \$500,000 will be made available to eligible entities to support conferences, trainings, and events focused on farm to school program development.

The USDA is soliciting applications for four types of grants for its Farm to School program.

1. Planning grants for school districts or schools beginning to incorporate farm to school program elements into their operations
2. Implementation grants to help schools and districts scale or further develop existing farm to school initiatives.
3. Support Service grants are intended for state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, and non-profits working with schools and districts to further develop existing farm to school initiatives and to provide support services for farm to school programs.
4. Conference and Event grants are open applications. They are intended to support conferences, events, and trainings that strengthen farm to school supply chains, or provide technical assistance in the area of local procurement, food safety, culinary education, and integration of agriculture-based curriculum.

Proposals for Planning, Implementation, and Support Service grants are due April 30, 2014 at 11:59 EST and must be submitted via grants.gov. The applicant must match 25 percent of the total project cost.

Promise Zone Stakeholder Webinars

[Promise Zones](#)

The US Department of Education is hosting a series of informational webinars on its Promise Zone program: on April 29, 2014 at 2:00-3:00 pm EST for Tribal Promise Zones and on April 30, 2014 from 3:00 to 4:00 pm EST for Rural Promise Zones. The webinars will include information such as: eligibility criteria and timeline for the program, best practices from the first round, dates for the public comment period for the second round of applications, and details on the President’s Promise Zone Budget Proposal. Between five and fifteen Promise Zones designations will be made during the second round in urban, rural, and tribal areas.

Registration for the webinars closes on Friday, April 25, 2014 at 5:00 pm EST

[RSVP](#) here for the Tribal Promise Zones Webinar

[RSVP](#) here for the Rural Promise Zones Webinar

Research, Commentary, or Other Developments in Rural Education

Students and Families Living in Rural Poverty: Research and Strategies for Educators [Information - Webinar](#)

REL Northeast and Islands is hosting a webinar on May 7, 2014 from 3:00 to 5:00 pm EST on the question of how rural educators can better support students and families that live in poverty. The webinar includes a presentation on rural poverty, the diversity in rural America, and attitudes toward poverty in rural communities as well as strategies that educators can use in working with low-income families.

The Effects of Rurality on College Access and Choice [Rural Students Disadvantaged in College Access, Choice](#)

Assistant Professor of Higher Education at Texas Tech, Andrew Koricich recently presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association on the effects of rurality on students' college choices and access. He found that students in non-metropolitan counties are only 85 percent as likely to go to college and those that do are more likely to choose two-year, public, or non-selective institutions. He argues that the "opportunity gap" for rural students could be lessened through better alignment between high school and college curricula, dual-enrollment programs, and financial aid for rural students.

Further, though rural students are underrepresented in higher education, they have received little attention from researchers. Koricich notes that much of the existing literature uses data from the 1980s and 1990s and that a new data set will become available later in 2014. He also proposes several policy solutions for increasing rural students' access to college and increasing their post-secondary choices, including expanding Promise Neighborhoods, weighted admissions for low-income students similar to the weight used for legacy admissions, dual-credit programs, and changes to financial aid distribution.

Rural Education: Examining Capacity Challenges that Influence Educator Effectiveness

Jane Best and Courtney Cohen

[McREL Policy Brief](#)

Though rural education has begun to receive more attention in recent years, many programs neglect the specific challenges faced by rural schools. This policy brief examines challenges related to recruiting and retaining effective teachers, education technology, and teacher evaluations and offers recommendations for policymakers interested in addressing rural education. The brief also highlights the socioeconomic, demographic, and educational diversity present in rural areas, noting that considering all of rural America as a monolithic unit may mean overlooking important differences in the challenges faced in each of these regions and its schools.

Educational Sorting and Residential Aspirations among Rural High School Students: What are the Contributions of Schools and Educators to Rural Brain Drain?

Robert Petrin, Kai Schafft, and Judith Meece
[Educational Sorting and Residential Aspirations](#)

Some scholarship suggests that rural educators and schools may be complicit in rural “brain drain,” devoting additional resources and attention to the best and brightest students who then become most likely to leave for postsecondary education or work outside of their home communities. In a new paper, Petrin, Schafft, and Meece find mixed support for this hypothesis using a national multi-method study of rural communities. The authors identified four “classes” of students based on their academic performance and level of school/community integration which they termed achiever stayers/leavers and nonacademic stayers/leavers.

Family structure (living with both parents) and the length of time in a community were both negatively associated with being a leaver. The researchers also found a strong relationship between minority status and being classified as a “leaver.” Overall, the researchers found that student perceptions of employment opportunities and not community poverty had a greater effect on leaver/stayer status.