



DEVELOPMENTS IN FEDERAL RURAL EDUCATION POLICY & RESEARCH May 2014

Bills in the US House and Senate

H.R. 4366 Strengthening Education through Research Act

05/12/2014 Received in the Senate, read twice

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

Sponsor: Representative Todd Rokita, R – IN

Co-Sponsors: Representative John Kline, R – MN; Representative George Miller, D – CA; Representative Carolyn McCarthy, D – NY; Representative Larry Bucshon, R – IN; Representative Ruben Hinojosa, D – TX; Representative Susan Brooks, R – IN; Representative Bradley Byrne, R – AL; Representative Brett Guthrie, R – KY; Representative Joseph Heck, R – NV; Representative Luke Messer, R – IN; Representative Thomas E. Petri, R – WI; Representative Glenn Thompson, R – PA; Representative Tim Walberg, R – MI; Representative Joe Wilson, R – SC

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

This bill ensures that 25 percent of the funding for Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) is used to serve rural areas. RELs currently work in rural communities and there are several reasons why it is important to ensure they have funding to continue this work. First, it is important to expanding the body of research on rural education. Second, RELs also provide direct services to communities, such as providing technical assistance to rural schools and districts. Third, they provide research that informs other federal programs and legislation, for example, looking at how rural schools' experiences with the SIG program differ from those of urban or suburban schools.

H.R. 10 Success and Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools Act

05/12/2014 Received in the Senate, read twice

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

Sponsor: Representative John Kline, R – MN

Co-Sponsors: Representative George Miller, D – CA; Representative Reuben Hinojosa, D – TX; Representative Duncan D. Hunter, D – CA; Representative Luke Messer, R – IN, Representative Scott H. Peters, D – CA; Representative Jared Polis, D – CO; Representative David P. Roe, R – TN; Representative Todd Rokita, R – IN; Representative Larry Bucshon, R – IN; Representative Scott DesJarlais, R – TN; Representative Tim Walberg, R – MI; Representative Sean P. Duffy, R – WI; Representative Thomas E. Petri, R – WI; Representative Steve Womack, R – AR; Representative Daniel Webster, R – FL; Representative Susan W. Brooks, R – IN; Representative Bradley Byrne, R – AL; Representative Blake Farenthold, R – TX; Representative Brett Guthrie, R – KY; Representative Joseph J. Heck, R – NV; Representative Richard Hudson, R – NC; Representative Joe Wilson, R – SC

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

The federal Charter School Program provides funding to state entities, which in turn provide subgrants for the creation of new, high-quality charter schools.

H.R.10 proposes three important changes to the program that would affect rural states specifically. First, it would prioritize funding for states with high-quality charter school laws and policies and focuses on the replication and expansion of high-quality schools. Second, it would require state entities to distribute subgrants (to the extent possible) throughout urban, suburban, and rural areas. Third, it would require state entities to include in their grant applications a description of how the state will support diverse charter school models, including schools that serve rural communities.

These changes have important implications for charter schools in rural states. Rural states with weak or restrictive charter school laws (for example, those that only allow LEA authorizers, place caps on charter schools, or provide unequal funding for charters) would be less likely to receive funding. In addition, the requirements for state entities to distribute funds across urban, suburban, and rural areas and to describe how funds will be used to support diverse charter school models would provide an impetus for state entities to explore and pursue the potential of rural charter schools.

S. 2304 Expanding Opportunity through Quality Charter Schools Act

05/07/2014 Read twice

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

Sponsor: Senator Mark Steven Kirk, R – IL

Co-Sponsors: Senator Mary Landrieu, D – LA; Senator Lamar Alexander, R – TN; Senator Michael F. Bennet, D – CO; Senator Dianne Feinstein, D – CA; Senator Rand Paul, R – KY; Senator Johnny Isakson, R – GA; Senator Marco Rubio, R – FL; Senator David Vitter, R – LA; Senator John Cornyn, R – TX; Senator Tim Scott, R – TX; Senator Cory Booker, D – NJ; Senator Orrin G. Hatch, R – UT; Senator Thomas R. Carper, D – DE; Senator Mitch McConnell, R – KY; Senator Ted Cruz, R – TX; Senator Richard Burr, R – NC; Senator Mark L. Pryor, D – AR

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

S. 2304 is the companion bill to H.R. 10. There are several major differences between them that would affect rural charter schools. First, S. 2304 includes a broader definition of “state entities,” including not only state education agencies but also state charter school boards, governors’ offices and charter school support organizations. This opens the opportunity for organizations based in rural areas or with missions specific to rural education to become a conduit for federal CSP funding.

S.2304 also includes a wider range of options for how CSP funding can be used, including some that may be of interest or benefit for rural schools: hiring, transportation, facilities renovation and construction, and board development. The House legislation only allows funds to be used to enhance facilities financing options such as through bonds or loan guarantees and is silent on the use of funding for transportation.

Finally, the House bill places a stronger emphasis on sharing of best practices between charter and district schools. It is also more explicit in addressing barriers to entry for youth in foster care, unaccompanied homeless students, students with special needs and English language learners. It also emphasizes the importance of subgrant applications to include parent and

community input. In contrast, the Senate bill emphasizes the need for charter school autonomy and flexibility, particularly schools' autonomy over personnel decisions.

There are a few additional, but minor, differences. For instance, the Senate bill provides for a three year grant term with the option of 1-2 year renewals; the House bill provides for a five year grant term. Additionally, the House bill calls for a GAO report on the appropriate funding level of the program.

H.R. 3916 Promoting Rural Broadband Act of 2014

01/16/2014 Referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce

Sponsor: Representative Derek Kilmer, D – WA

Co-Sponsor: Representative Peter Welch, D – VT

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

This bill would require the FCC to promote the expansion of spectrum-based services to “exceptionally hard-to-serve populations in unserved and underserved geographic locations” when prescribing regulations for competitive bidding processes for electromagnetic spectrum licenses. Specifically, it would change the competitive bidding process for spectrum licenses, encouraging or requiring the expansion of broadband services in underserved rural areas. However, spectrum alone would not provide broadband to rural areas; accessing these services would also require significant investments in infrastructure.

Funding Opportunities for Rural Schools

USDA Grants for “Advanced Communications Technology in Rural Areas”

[USDA Grant Programs](#)

On May 22, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced funding opportunities for rural telecommunications and broadband services. The Community Connect Grant Program offers \$13 million in funding to expand broadband service in rural communities with the goal of supporting economic growth, education, health care, and public safety. Community Connect grantees must meet several requirements: serve an area without existing broadband services, provide a community center with broadband access, and offer broadband to residential and business customers. Special consideration for Community Connect funding will be given to applicants that contain at least one “end user site” within a trust area or tribal jurisdiction area. Additionally, over \$19 million will be offered through the Distance Learning and Telemedicine (DLT) program to support access to rural education, health care, and training resources.

Applications for these programs must be received by July 7, 2014.

Research, Commentary, or Other Developments in Rural Education

Why Rural Matters 2013-14

[Report from the Rural Schools and Community Trust](#)

A biannual publication, “Why Rural Matters” examines the condition of rural education in the 50 states. The 2013-14 report is framed around five key indicators: “the health of rural families, socioeconomic challenges facing rural communities, the educational policy context

impacting rural schools, and the educational outcomes of students in rural schools. States' scores within these five gauges determined their final "Rural Education Priority Ranking."

Overall, Idaho is 18th on the Rural Education Priority Ranking. In addition:

- Only five states educate a higher percentage of ELL students than Idaho
- Only Arizona spends less per pupil on instruction in rural districts than Idaho
- Idaho has low teacher salaries and draws heavily on local dollars
- Idaho's educational outcomes are around the national average
- More than half of Idaho's rural students live in poverty
- Idaho ranks 32nd in the number of rural students
- Idaho is above the U.S. average in the percent of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch