



DEVELOPMENTS IN RURAL EDUCATION POLICY & RESEARCH March 2014

Legislative Action in Idaho Affecting Rural Education

Idaho Senate Bill 1343: Legislative Approval for K-12 Agreements

02/10 Introduced by Senator Russell Fulcher, R – Meridian

02/11 Referred to Education Committee

[Bill Text](#)

This bill is in response to the state's adoption of the Common Core State Standard (CCSS). While Idaho's 2011 adoption of the CCSS did not require legislative approval, this legislation would require any *future* agreement—between the State Board of Education or the State Department of Education and “any multistate consortium” or the federal government—concerning K-12 testing, curriculum, standards, and the student data generated by the K-12 education system to be ratified by the Legislature.

This bill highlights the growing opposition to consortiums and national standards and is more significant because it was proposed by Fulcher, a gubernatorial candidate and political opponent of Governor Butch Otter. Since rural districts could face a particularly heavy burden implementing CCSS—they lack the resources that many urban and suburban districts can dedicate to professional development and implementation—they could be a pivotal constituency should Idaho revisit this debate.

Idaho House Bill 543: K-12 Study Committees

02/21 Introduced by the Appropriations Committee, read first time, referred for printing

02/27 Read third time in full – PASSED – House 67-2-1

02/28 Received from the House passed; filed for first reading
Introduced, read first time; referred to: Finance

03/04 Reported out of Committee with do pass recommendation, filed for second reading

03/05 Read second time, filed for third reading

[Bill Text](#)

This bill increases the 2014 appropriation for the State Board of Education by \$20,000. The funding would support special committees, under the oversight of the State Board, which would study topics in K-12 public school structure and funding, including but not limited to compensation models, teacher licensure, accountability, autonomy, or mastery learning.

Depending on the topics chosen by the study committee, this legislation could help generate insights and policy solutions for rural education. For example, a study on alternative teacher certification pathways could lead to expanded opportunities for human capital in rural areas.

Idaho House Bills 428 and 568: Spousal Employment

01/28 Introduced by the Education Committee, read first time, referred for printing— HB 428

01/28 Reported printed and referred to Education— HB 428

02/27 Introduced, read first time, referred for printing— HB 568

02/28 Reported printed and referred to Education— HB 568

[Bill Text - HB 428](#)
[Bill Text - HB 568](#)

These bills revise the terms under which a school district or charter school may hire the spouse of a trustee. Previous legislation disallowed trustees' spouses to be hired or compensated. This bill allows districts with fewer than 1,200 students to employ a trustee's spouse, but places multiple limiting conditions that must be met. These conditions include an open application period, a lack of other applicants that met the minimum criteria, the trustee's absence during the hiring discussion occurred, and the trustee's abstention from voting on employment. Conditions are similar for the spousal employment of charter school trustees. If conditions above are met, the legislation further specifies that a spouse may only be hired on a one-year contract and cannot be rehired the following year unless the same conditions are met.

This bill provides rural districts and charter schools with some additional flexibility in their efforts to recruit teachers and other staff. However, it creates significant new barriers for these districts and charters to hire a trustee's spouse, even if the spouse is a higher quality candidate than others who meet the minimum criteria.

Idaho Senate Bill 1233: Funding for Advanced Opportunities

01/22 Introduced by the Education Committee, read first time; referred for printing
02/20 Read third time in full as amended – PASSED Senate – 28-6-1
02/21 Received from the Senate, read first time, referred to Education

[Bill Text](#)

Senate Bill 1233 provides funding for students in grades 11 and 12 to take Advanced Placement and other dual-credit courses. Students in grade 11 can qualify for \$200 towards course and exam fees and students in grade 12 can qualify for up to \$400 towards course and exam fees. Students who participate in the Mastery Scholarship program (a scholarship program for students who complete a public district school/public charter school's 1-12 curricula at least one year early) do not qualify for this funding.

This bill provides students with funding to earn college credit during high school and could provide an additional opportunity to help rural students become college-ready and potentially increase the number of students from rural areas who take AP and other advanced courses.

Idaho Senate Bill 1229: Dual Credit Courses

01/22 Introduced by the Education Committee; read first time; referred for printing
02/11 Read third time in full – PASSED Senate – 34-0-1
02/26 Read third time – PASSED House – 69-0-1
02/28 Reported signed by Governor on 02/28/14

[Bill Text](#)

Idaho Senate Bill 1229 creates a definition for dual credit courses (those included on a student's secondary and postsecondary transcripts) and expands eligibility for dual credit courses to all high school students, not just those in grades 11 and 12. This bill provides rural schools with additional opportunities to show their students that postsecondary education is a viable option and to help put them on the path to college.

Idaho House Bill 557: "Use it or Lose It" Phase Out

02/26 Introduced by Representative DeMordaunt, R-14; read first time; referred for printing
03/04 Read third time – PASSED House - 68-0-2

03/05 Received from the House, filed for first reading. Introduced, read first time, referred to Education

[Bill Text](#)

This bill phases out the “use it or lose it” budget flexibility created during the economic downturn that allows Idaho districts to hire 9.5 percent fewer teachers than the state funds. Proposed changes, beginning in 2015-16, would reduce the 9.5 percent flexibility by one percent each year for each district in which the average class size was at least one student above the state average. If this legislation does not pass, the “use it or lose it” flexibility will expire at the end of the 2013-14 school year.

Rural superintendents often cite the need for more flexibility in funding. The flexibility allowed during the downturn has allowed rural districts with smaller enrollments to adapt their staffing models and budgets. The current phase-out strategy for this bill means that for many rural schools (those with smaller class sizes) will retain the flexibility afforded through the “use it or lose it” program.

Funding for Idaho Education Network Broadband

Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee Decision

[IdahoEdNews article on Broadband](#)

The Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee has agreed to devote \$6.6 million to keep the Idaho Education Network broadband system afloat in the state’s high schools until June 30th. This funding is a back-stop to delays in federal E-Rate dollars. The Appropriations Committee did not agree to fund the program without conditions. Education Networks of America (ENA) and the Department of Administration must refund all of the funding if and when the program receives from the state to the General Fund if it receives “E-Rate” funding. The state and ENA must also amend their contract, agreeing that the funding does not constitute “acknowledgement of liability” on the part of Idaho.

With broadband more difficult to access in rural areas, programs like E-Rate are critical to ensuring access to for rural schools. Further, broadband helps schools implement cost-saving programs and new technologies.

National Funding Opportunities for Rural Schools

America’s Famers Grow Rural Education

[Grow Rural Education](#)

The Monsanto Fund will grant \$2.3 million to support science and math education in rural schools in 2014. Once nominated by a farmer, rural public school districts (and eligible charter schools) in 39 states are eligible to apply for grants of \$10,000 or \$25,000. District applications are due April 21, 2014.

In order to nominate a school district, a farmer must be at least 21 years old and actively engaged in farming with a minimum of 250 acres of corn, soybeans, or cotton; or 40 acres of open field vegetables; or at least 10 acres of tomatoes, peppers, or cucumbers grown in protected culture. Nominations from farmers must be received by April 6, 2014.

Bills in the US House and Senate

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

02/12/2014 Referred to Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy, and Forestry

Sponsor: Representative Peter DeFazio, D– OR

Previous 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

07/8/2013 Referred to Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education

Sponsored by Representative Susan Davis, D– CA

[Bill Summary](#)

[Bill Text](#)

Establishes a principal recruitment and training grant program to 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 program 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.”

Research, Commentary, or Other Developments in Rural Education

Rural School and Community Trust

[Valuable, Flexible, and Cost-Effective: Making the Most of Small Scale](#)

Policy is often “one-size-fits-all”—and aimed largely at more densely populated areas. As a result, these policies create extensive overhead structures that rural areas not only do not need, but which are expensive and detrimental. This article highlights some of the considerations essential for designing policy for rural areas and recommends key strategies for policymakers to use when crafting policies that affect rural, as well as urban and suburban, communities.

Rural School and Community Trust

[Going Two Ways at Once: Defining Distance as a Rural Characteristic](#)
[EdWeek Rural Education Blog Coverage](#)

In rural communities, distance means long commutes, high transportation costs, and extensive bussing systems. Students in rural areas are less likely to participate in after school activities, affecting learning and leadership opportunities. The Rural School and Community Trust made recommendations to “reduce the cost of distance” in rural communities, including locating institutions as close to possible as where residents live, investing in broadband, considering the

school bus system as a rural public transit system, and providing sufficient transportation funding for rural institutions.

US Department of Education
[Coverage in EdWeek Rural Blog](#)

After months of speculation about a potential replacement for Deputy Assistant Secretary for Rural Education John White, who left the US Department of Education in late 2013, it was announced that his responsibilities would be shifted to two communications staff members operating from regional offices in Missouri and Georgia. Though the arrangement may not be permanent, it has disappointed some, such as Rob Mahaffey, President of the Rural School and Community Trust, who saw White as a strong voice for rural policy in Washington and has advocated for the Department to create an Office of Rural Education Policy.

Battelle for Kids
[Making Rural Education Work for Our Kids and Our Future](#)

Battelle for Kids, an Ohio-based organization, recently published a report, “Making Rural Education Work for Our Kids and Our Future,” on the importance of rural education in America and recommendations for making rural education “work” for students, schools, and communities. The report has three primary recommendations for what it refers to as “rural prosperity initiatives:” mapping the territory to figure out within and across states where and how to invest in integrated and scalable approaches to education, economic, and community development; making connections to build deep relationships with a significant portion of local community members, and develop a feasible resource base for moving collaborative action forward; and mobilize for rapid and sustainable scale that truly overcomes deep and enduring rural economic and education opportunity gaps.

National Center for Research on Rural Education - 2013
[Advancing Rural Education Research: Importance of Interdisciplinary Research Partnerships](#)

The National Center for Research on Rural Education published a paper analyzing conversations from last year’s National Conference on Rural Education Research. The conference participants included policymakers, practitioners, and researchers who took part in a total of 28 roundtable conversations during the conference. Analysis of the conversations yielded four main primary themes: the need for research partnerships that foster communication and dialogue with stakeholders, the challenge of defining what “rural” means and accounting for unique characteristics of rural communities, various influences on student outcomes in rural communities, and better strategies for communicating and disseminating results of research to rural educators.