



## **2018 Advocacy Agenda**

The **Mission** of the Colorado Rural Schools Alliance is to provide a structure through which rural school districts and community members can unite in their efforts to increase the opportunities available to Colorado's rural students and communities.

### **Board Priorities**

The Rural Alliance Board has identified the following priorities for the 2017-18 school year:

1. School finance/funding
2. Flexibility
3. Working with CDE to ensure that rules and practices reflect an understanding of rural needs and realities.

#### **I. School Funding/Finance/Equity**

Colorado school districts are critically underfunded. The Rural Alliance will ~~work to~~ identify and advance short and long-term solutions to the current school-funding crisis.

#### **Education/Partnerships/Communications**

- The Rural Alliance will collaborate with the 2018 Table and other partners to explore opportunities for solutions to the school-funding crisis.
- The Rural Alliance will communicate the detrimental impact of the Budget Stabilization (BS) Factor ~~budget cuts~~ on rural schools with State and local policy makers.
- Rural Alliance members will partner with their communities about the need for more funding and the detrimental impact of the BS Factor on their classrooms, schools, district and related services. The Rural Alliance provides support to our members' efforts to increase such efforts in their communities.

- The Rural Alliance will advocate and bring resources to address other funding/equity issues, including rural teacher shortage, blended learning opportunities and access to mental health and affordable broadband services.

### **Legislative Priorities**

- The Rural Alliance supports the Superintendents Funding Distribution Formula.
- The Rural Alliance will work to stabilize school funding and generate additional revenues for public schools and extend the \$30 million appropriation for Rural schools.
- The Rural Alliance and its members will work with the legislature to find short and long term solutions to the school-funding crisis, which may include lowering current statutory reserve obligations and examining Colorado's current complex constitutional and statutory spending and tax policies.
- The Rural Alliance advocates for sending additional marijuana excise tax revenues to the BEST program and increasing the COP cap.

## **II. Promoting Rural Education/Flexibility/Local Choice**

Rural school districts are highly accountable to their local communities and benefit from close-knit relationships between and among their students, teachers and community members. Rural districts' limited resources are burdened by complex and unnecessary bureaucratic mandates that divert critical resources away from improving student outcomes.

### **Education/Partnership/Communication**

- The Rural Alliance will promote the exceptional opportunities available to students in rural school districts.
- The Rural Alliance will highlight members' innovative educational strategies and create statewide learning communities to scale this important work.
- The Rural Alliance will build public-private partnerships to address teacher shortages and increase educational opportunities for rural students.

### **State Board/CDE**

- The Rural Alliance will partner with CDE and the State Board to develop simplified licensure pathways for Rural educators.
- The Rural Alliance will cooperate with CDE, the State Board and other stakeholders to develop a “learning agenda” in Colorado to include a waiver process for districts or groups of districts to waive out of state and federal accountability requirements in order to pilot a new process. CDE will be a supportive partner in this work, including requesting the federal waivers, helping to generate funding and other resources/partnerships to advance and coordinate the local efforts.

### **Legislative Priorities**

- The Rural Alliance advocates for legislation to increase local capacity for innovation and locally driven reform in the areas of assessment, accountability, licensure and evaluation.
- The current accountability system relies too heavily on state assessments. The Rural Alliance advocates for greater flexibility for districts to implement assessments and accountability measures that provide a more accurate picture of the work in their districts as well as timely and meaningful data for their teachers and communities.
- The Rural Alliance opposes the imposition of any new unfunded state mandates and advocates for rural flexibility in such mandates.
- The Rural Alliance advocates for efforts to scale back state-mandated assessments and supports legislation eliminating PARCC in high school and replacing the mandated high school assessment with a menu of choices for districts, including but not limited to SAT and ACT.
- Rural school districts are experiencing critical teacher shortages and must have flexibility to attract and retain teachers through non-traditional methods. The Rural Alliance will advocate for legislation increasing local flexibility and choice to support rural teacher recruitment and retention efforts.