



2017 Advocacy Agenda

The **Mission** of the Colorado Rural Schools Alliance is to provide a structure through which rural and remote school districts and their community members can strengthen their collective voice and 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 2016-17 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 increase awareness as to the detrimental impact of the Negative Factor budget cuts on rural schools with State and local policy makers.
- Rural Alliance members will educate their communities about the need for more funding and the detrimental impact of the Negative Factor budget cuts on their classrooms and services. The Rural Alliance provides support to our members' efforts to increase such awareness in their communities.
- The Rural Alliance will advocate to raise awareness 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 will work to stabilize school funding and generate additional revenues for public 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 the creation of additional “enterprises” within the meaning of TABOR, lowering current statutory reserve obligations and examining Colorado’s current complex constitutional and statutory spending and tax policies.
- Any review and revision of the current school finance formula must recognize and support the unique challenges in rural school districts and be accompanied by funding and/or other mechanisms to eliminate/minimize cuts to schools/districts.
- The Rural Alliance opposes any cuts/changes to the current funding stream for BEST.

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

State Board/CDE

- The Rural Alliance will work with CDE and the State Board to develop a simplified rural waiver process.
- The Rural Alliance will work 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.
- The Rural Alliance urges CDE to appoint a cabinet level rural advisor to the Commissioner and otherwise advance the recommendations for supporting rural school districts set forth by the National Association of State Board of Education (NASBE) in its report entitled *Educating Students in Rural America: Capitalizing on Strengths, Overcoming Barriers*.
- The Rural Alliance urges CDE and the State Board to maximize the flexibility available to states under ESSA and to seek waivers, as necessary, to support local districts seeking to reform our existing state systems, including assessment, accountability, evaluation and licensure, to better suit and reflect local needs and realities.

Legislative Priorities

- The Rural Alliance supports 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 supports 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 state mandates.
- The Rural Alliance supports 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 supports legislation increasing local flexibility and choice to support rural teacher recruitment and retention efforts.