



## **Rural Education: Programs, Policies and Funding**

### **Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) Reauthorization Act (S.567)**

AESA is once again pushing for additional co-sponsors for the REAP Reauthorization Act. Although a House companion bill has not yet been introduced, the Senate bill has 10 co-sponsors and we are actively encouraging additional co-sponsors in order to demonstrate why REAP must be included in any base ESEA bill that is being developed by the Senate HELP Committee.

There are four major changes to the re-authorized REAP bill:

1. REAP will be updated to include the new locale codes that have been developed by the Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Locale codes determine which districts are considered rural, and determine part of the eligibility requirement for both programs. These locale codes are supposed to be more accurate and are being phased in as various rural programs are reauthorized.
2. Under current law, if a district is eligible for both programs, they are automatically enrolled under the Small and Rural Schools Achievement Program. The REAP Reauthorization bill will change this and allow districts eligible for both programs, but not receiving additional funding under the Small and Rural Schools Achievement Program, to apply under the Rural and Low-Income Schools Program. This will affect approximately 200 school districts across the country.
3. Another change switches the eligibility poverty measure from 20 percent Census poverty to 40 percent free and reduced-price lunch for those districts under the Rural and Low-Income Schools Program. Census poverty is an inaccurate measure of poverty for school districts, especially in areas where school district borders are not contiguous with county borders.
4. The last change shift in the sliding formula from the current \$20,000 to \$60,000 to a new scale of \$25,000 to \$80,000. Under the current maximum and minimums, many districts find that their REAP grant amounts are fully offset by title funds. Higher minimum and maximum grants could help rural districts better meet their needs.

### **Office of Rural Education Policy Act (S.946)**

This year new legislation was introduced that would create the first ever Office of Rural Education Policy in the Department of Education. S.946 requires the Department to establish and maintain a clearinghouse on best practices and research specific to the needs of rural schools, as well produce an annual report on the condition of rural education that would be submitted to Congress. The office is also charged with greater coordination of federal department/agency programs that relate to rural schools.

Additionally, the legislation requires that whenever the Department of Education promulgates new rules and regulations, the Department must explicitly describe how these rules and regulations would affect rural schools and communities.

### **REAP in FY12 Budget Proposal**

President Obama's FY12 budget proposal funded REAP at FY10 levels or at \$173.5 million. As other federal education programs are cut or eliminated and more dollars are distributed through competitive grants, REAP becomes even more important in filling the funding shortfall for many districts.

### Talking Points

1. Urge your Senators to sponsor S.567 the Rural Education Achievement Program Reauthorization Act, that would create the necessary improvements in REAP to ensure that rural school districts receive the necessary federal assistance.
2. Urge your Representatives to pressure the House Education and Labor Committee, particularly Republican leaders on the Committee, to introduce a REAP bill with the same language and changes as the Senate REAP Re-Authorization bill (S 567).
3. Let your Senators and Representative know how important it is to preserve funding for REAP in this year's budget, especially in light of the funding shortfall many districts are anticipating next year.
4. Encourage your Senators to become a co-sponsor for S.946, the Office of Rural Education Policy. With nearly one-quarter of the nation's students enrolled in rural schools, it is critical that more federal resources are devoted to improving rural schools and rural student achievement. Especially in light of recent policies like Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants, the Department must be forced to consider the unique challenges rural communities face whenever it promulgates regulations and coordinates federal activities.