

The National Summit on the Role of Education in Economic Development in Rural America

Event Summary
And
Recommendations



The first ***National Summit on the Role of Education in Economic Development in Rural America*** was convened by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) on May 4, 2011, in Washington, D.C. This event was a collaborative effort by ECS with the U. S. Department of Education and U. S. Department of Agriculture, and was sponsored by AT&T, Archer Daniels Midland and the National Education Association.

This Rural Summit produced recommendations under the headings of “State and Local” and “Federal” in the following categories:

- Rural Infrastructure
- Flexibility in Implementing Rural Improvement Strategies
- Lack of Job Opportunities in Rural America
- General/Cross-cutting.

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- Arne Duncan, U. S. Secretary of Education
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State and Local Rural Infrastructure Recommendations

Broadband/Technology

State and local entities need to develop specific strategies for expanding broadband capacity in rural areas. Increased broadband would encourage and enhance distance learning and support business development. State and local entities need to conduct strategic planning to ensure equity across the state.

Partnerships

State and local entities need to take renewed action to form state, regional and local partnerships that result in sharing and aligning resources and policies to increase educational attainment levels and economic development that results in sustained growth and jobs. Rural partnerships between institutions of higher education, school districts, local municipalities and businesses can result in true academic and career alignment that would prepare all students for essential postsecondary education and training, and livable-wage jobs that are needed in rural America and elsewhere.

Online/Distance Learning

Online/distance learning is a viable method for delivering high-quality education, especially high-demand, special topic and advanced courses to rural students. Higher education, school districts and businesses must work together to align online/distance learning curriculum and standards to ensure students meet these high standards, transition into postsecondary education or training, and move into the occupations that will drive rural economic development. Distance learning also will ensure that high-quality teachers are available to work with every student in every possible content area. Integrating the needs of businesses with education course offerings, K-20, will result in a win-win situation, especially for rural students and adults. Exploring how this integration has occurred in other regions, states and countries is encouraged.

E-Rate

States need to review the E-Rate regulations to ensure that barriers are eliminated to receive E-Rate resources/funding and to implement E-Rate funded activities and programs. Consideration needs to be given to the concern that E-Rate subsidies for schools and libraries are fragmenting the market so it is not viable for commercial service to companies.

Procurement/Permitting

State and local entities need to review state and local procurement and permitting processes to ensure there are not barriers to economic development and collaboration in rural America. A

targeted focus on streamlining these processes to increase the opportunities for multiple cities, regions and states to work together on educational and economic development goals is critical.

Data

State and local entities (higher education, school districts, municipalities, businesses) need to design and/or merge data systems to reduce duplication and increase efficiency and accuracy.

Statewide and Local Analysis of Rural Needs/Priorities

State and local entities need to conduct a needs assessment to determine rural priorities, strengths and weaknesses to guide educational and economic development planning and implementation.

Maximizing School Facility Use

State and local entities should collaborate on how to maximize the use of school facilities to meet the priorities of all partners, including the school district, businesses, higher education and community.

Incentives

State and local entities need to consider offering incentives to promote collaboration in building rural infrastructure of any nature.

Funding for Rural America

State and local entities should coordinate their efforts to gain federal support in maintaining and increasing rural education and economic development.

Health

State and local entities need to seek all available options for accessing high-quality health care, including prenatal services. These options may include itinerant health care specialists, tele-health care and co-op health care providers.

Less Bureaucracy and More Flexibility

State and local entities should partner, whenever possible, to reduce duplication and reporting requirements, while increasing efficiency through the use of uniform reporting, budgeting and procurement.

Improvement of Rural Services

State and local entities need to invest time, commitment and shared resources to target improvement of rural community services, as a means of attracting stable populations, attracting new businesses and attracting high-quality educators. Local alliances and partnerships that effectively address transportation, housing, water and waste management, and other basic services, health care, connectivity, education and economic development will result in families and businesses moving to rural areas. Improvement should be focused on the ones that impact potential growth the most.

Cell Phones

State and local entities need to recognize the importance and efficacy of cell phone/mobile technology and then promote policies related to the use of such technology in K-20 education.

Federal Rural Infrastructure Recommendations

E-Rate

Federal agencies and entities must continue support for the E-Rate and other broadband programs to support distance learning and economic development capacity in rural America. Federal agencies and entities need to seek direct recommendations from E-Rate users to review the E-Rate program's requirements and policies and do the following:

- Address E-Rate policies that are currently fragmenting the market and negatively impacting the for-profit market
- Remove E-Rate exclusions
- Deregulate and increase allowances related to inclusion and reimbursement for mobile devices in classrooms.

Less Bureaucracy/More Flexibility/Remove Silos

Federal agencies and entities must reduce working in program "silos" that have conflicting and/or duplicative program requirements. With several large federal acts scheduled to be reauthorized in the coming months, it is an ideal time for federal agencies to work collaboratively to eliminate reporting and paperwork burdens, redundancies and conflicting requirements by:

- Working toward non-duplicative data submissions, uniform budget and budget narrative formats
- Identifying clearly how various programs can work together to better serve students and adults,
- Simplifying grant and contract processes and requirements to ensure a level playing field.

Grants

All federal agencies that issue grants must develop grant and contract specifications with clear understanding of how the specifications would impact rural America. If federal agencies want rural entities to be competitive with their grant and contract submissions, the specifications must be written in such a way as not to favor urban or suburban education and economic development organizations that have well-developed fund-seeking infrastructures (staff, expertise, etc.). Specifications that are unbiased and level the playing field must be created.

All federal agencies need to review grant/contract program requirements with an eye toward simplification and clarity. Accountability must be clear and present, but micromanaging and excessive reporting requirements and overly prescriptive program requirements must be addressed.

Resource Information

A federal “rural” resources database/Web site should be developed. This site should house resources, information and grant/contract information that specifically applies to rural America (education, economic development, transportation, broadband/technology, infrastructure, etc.).

Incentives

All federal agencies should continue to provide incentives to rural America for innovation, creativity and high accountability with regard to educational improvement and achievement that aligns with economic development, postsecondary education, training and rural jobs.

Broadband/Technology

Federal agencies need to continue to expand specific strategies for increasing broadband capacity in rural areas, including cell phone coverage. Increased broadband would encourage and enhance efforts related to online/distance learning and attract businesses for economic development purposes. Expanded broadband capacity would promote innovation and competition, as well as help level the playing field with other non-rural areas in states, with other states and internationally.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The U. S. Department of Education needs to “fix” the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provisions during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The current AYP provisions do not accurately reflect where schools are doing well or not doing well and do not promote the use of growth measures. For rural schools in advanced stages of improvement, more than the four allowable restructuring options are needed.

Child Nutrition Program

The U. S. Department of Agriculture needs to consider an expansion of the Child Nutrition Program to make it a year-round program rather than follow the school year for the provision of services.

Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP)

The U. S. Department of Education needs to consider increasing Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) funding and ensure that the program requirements for use of this funding ensure the greatest flexibility possible, while maintaining accountability.

State and Local Flexibility in Implementing Rural Improvement Strategies Recommendations

Incentives

State and local entities need to consider offering incentives to promote the benefits of living, working and investing in rural America. Incentives offered to citizens and businesses to re-locate to rural areas — based on documented, positive aspects of living in rural areas — can entice new populations and new economic bases.

Funding for Rural America

State and local entities need to re-evaluate current funding formulas and strategies related to rural education and economic development. During this re-evaluation, consideration needs to be given not only to the effective use of state and local dollars, but also to maximizing federal funding to meet state and local goals and visions. A more effective and comprehensive use of all funding sources takes great thought and planning, but is worth the up-front effort.

Grants

State and local entities must, in planning for requests for proposals and establishing grant programs, recognize rural America's unique issues and have this accounted for in grant applications and grant program administration.

Federal Flexibility in Implementing Rural Improvement Strategies Recommendations

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)/ESEA

The U. S. Department of Education must recognize the unique differences that face rural America when reauthorizing existing education laws/acts or creating new laws/acts. Equitable funding formulas, small rural class sizes related to statistical validity, rural options for turning around low-performing schools, and teacher and principal staffing needs must be recognized when drafting program requirements in acts such as ESEA, Carl Perkins, IDEA and others. One size does not fit all — for good and valid reasons.

- Make Title I funding at the U. S. Department of Education more equitable for rural districts by moving from a number-based weighting system to a percent system. By measuring based on percent of free and reduced lunch students, it would result in more equitable funding for rural communities.
- Increase flexibility in the ESEA four options to improve low performing school performance.

- NCLB testing of small districts unfairly penalizes rural — class sizes insufficient to be statistically valid.

Other Flexibility in Implementing Rural Improvement Strategies Recommendations

Career and Technical Education

State, local and federal entities must focus not only on core academic success for all students, but equally focus on and integrate career and postsecondary education skills that are needed for success in higher education, training and at work. Success comes from mastery of academic and career and technical education skills — not with one set of skills or the other. Restructuring the education experience in a way that addresses and values both sets of skills is long overdue.

State and Local Recommendations to Address the Lack of Job Opportunities in Rural America

Career and Technical Education

State and local entities must increase opportunities for students of all ages to learn about high-demand job requirements, a variety of career pathways and the training and education required for each pathway, and to be exposed to instruments that assess work skills that can lead to “next steps” for achieving additional work skills needed for high-demand jobs and other jobs of interest. 21st century skills needed for success in postsecondary education, training, and jobs must be learned, alongside academic and content skills throughout one’s life.

- Middle school career inventories increase exposure to high demand jobs.
- Examples of job creation and training (including ADM handout and Alaska Construction Academy) are very dated. Most of the jobs we need to train for don’t even exist yet – the fields are still emerging. We need to teach rural kids how to create jobs, not train them to work for outside corporations.
- Focus on early career pathways and advancing students’ broad knowledge of opportunities.
- Focus on career and technical education, including job shadowing and other business experiences — this allows flexibility for students to be engaged in “hands-on” experiences to see relevancy to learning.
- Offer WorkKeys to all students to assess work skills and match with high-demand jobs.
- Give students the opportunity to experience a variety of work models that relate to rural America.
- Develop a job training high school program.
- Work with industry on career exploration.

Data

State and local entities need to link and then use multiple data sources in order to form strategies to inform and align educational services and programs with economic opportunities and increase the number of jobs in rural America. There is a multitude of education and economic development information sources in existence at the state and local levels that too often are not connected, much less read and analyzed, before critical decisions are made.

- Better use of labor market information and sector strategies is needed to inform and align educational services and programs with economic opportunities.
- Link data sources.
- Provide state and feds with specific data and impacts of shovel-ready projects.
- Look at the value of data, taking to scale and replicating what works, and bringing different players together.
- Know what jobs are available and where are they.
-

Service Learning

State and local entities must understand and then employ, service-learning as a means to preparing students to have the 21st century skills necessary for success in education, training and employment. Service-learning enhances and expands content knowledge, builds character and ensures that students have the work-readiness skills needed in the workplace.

Entrepreneurial Activities

State and local entities need to work jointly to learn about and adopt policies and plans that expand entrepreneurial activities, leading to increased job opportunities in rural America. Entrepreneurial education starts in the K-12 education system and continues into postsecondary education and training, and also with adults who need to change careers or want to build on good business ideas. Expanding entrepreneurial activities also includes identifying and working with federal agencies that already support these kinds of activities and have resources and information to share.

- Focus on teaching entrepreneurial skills that can help students start their own businesses and be successful.
- Grow your own construction business and other job programs; get education, business and government working together to promote high-demand jobs with young people.
- Increase work-based learning and entrepreneurship.
- Create sustainable economic development institutes (SEDI) to discuss needs and possible opportunities.
- Create economic development plans.
- Teach entrepreneurial skills to all students to develop confidence in starting their own businesses and having the spirit to be an entrepreneur for a company.
- Coordinate with USDA (especially on reservations and in frontier states) to, for example, open farmers markets/ "grow your own" type projects. This would create job opportunities that could build off agriculture or other existing programs.
- Schools should build in an entrepreneurial component to attract new businesses and provide options for graduates.

Use of Community Colleges and Universities

State and local entities need to work closely with community colleges and universities to ensure there is an alignment between coursework, programs and real job opportunities — and that this coursework is transferable from one institution to another, so that transfer students can complete coursework at any institution and enter the job market quickly. Entities also need to:

- Resolve credit transfer issues for students
- Align schools and universities so community college courses are credit worthy at major universities (credential).

Federal Recommendations to Address the Lack of Job Opportunities in Rural America

Incentives

Federal agencies need to expand and target incentives for students and adults to become educated and trained for jobs in rural America — and for educators and businesses to move to rural locations and work with students and community members to expand economic development and job opportunities. Expanding student and/or business loan forgiveness, providing incentives for highly qualified and effective educators to work in rural areas and increasing tax incentives for businesses re-locating to rural areas can impact rural job creation.

Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act

The U. S. Department of Education needs to work on the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act to increase funding for this act and tie these funds to articulation agreements and entities that ensure student credits earned transfer to other entities that provide career and technical education, postsecondary education and training and specific job training. Currently, this program is overly prescriptive and has an intense paperwork burden attached to those who are funded with Perkins dollars. Additionally, funding for this Act has not increased in over 10 years.

- Tie Perkins money to accepting articulation agreements.
- Create legislation that requires that credits transfer to be eligible for Perkins dollars.

Workforce Investment Act

The U. S. Department of Labor needs to work on the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act to ensure that Workforce Investment Boards are structured in such a way as to increase their effectiveness and productivity, with regard to job creation. Special note should be taken with regard to the size of the Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and expansion of WIBs to U. S. Territories.

General and Cross-cutting Recommendations Generated at the Rural Summit on the Role of Education in Economic Development in Rural America

General Recommendations

Partnerships

- Need partnerships between rural entities — education, commercial, health organizations — because they all depend on the economic development of their community.
- More higher education and K-12 partnerships are needed.
- Strengthen the links between education, nutrition, health and economic development.
- Partner with existing programs to enhance job training (i.e., extension, 4-H, FFA).
- Simplify systems to enhance partnerships (i.e., public/private, community colleges, four-year colleges, etc.)

Less Bureaucracy/More Flexibility

- Shift focus of state Department of Education from heavy compliance emphasis to customer service/support emphasis.
- Develop new measures of success — accountability is always needed, but how to avoid paperwork, rules and nightmares.

Use of Community Colleges and Universities

- Make and recognize community colleges as the center of the rural communities and be the drivers of job creation, K-12 partnerships, a resource for remedial education and a center for innovation.
- Promote the use of community colleges as a source of obtaining “core” courses prior to enrollment in four-year institutions.
- Create programs between community colleges and universities that eliminate “transfer” issues — more students would enter the workforce pipeline faster.
- Make it easier for high schools to partner with community colleges to teach college courses in schools to have rural, isolated students graduate with both high school and AA degrees.
- Community colleges can be the center of technology — including job creation centers and centers for partnerships with K-12 — as well as centers of information and remedial education, and can provide a vocational infrastructure for rural communities.

Maximizing School Facility Use

- Consider year-round schools and/or extended school years at state and local levels.

- Extend learning time utilizing community resources when possible is needed.
- Enable rural schools to multi-task — serving as the community’s library, health clinic, fitness center, etc.

Statewide and Local Analysis of Rural Needs/Priorities

- Conduct needs analyses in states to advise them on what they are lacking and what they are not taking advantage of.
- Develop new measures of need for rural areas.
- Create mindset changes (both urban and rural) regarding expectations and opportunities.

Remove Silos

- Need to fundamentally improve the collaboration across agency and government levels to respond to the project, education and economic development issues.
- Reduce duplication in local governments (city/county/special purpose).

Broadband/Technology

- Need more focus on improving technology for school systems and rural communities.
- Need to move older policymakers’ vision of technology and distance delivery.

Career and Technical Education

- Give career and technical education (applied and project-based education) a higher priority and funding level within the context of education reform.

Resources Information

- Need more access to information — job types, job opportunities, resources.

Cross-cutting Recommendations

There were four topics that appeared in almost every recommendation category:

1. The need for more/continued transparency
2. The need for more/continued accountability
3. The need for more/continued opportunities for innovation
4. The need for revisions to the F-1 VISA laws/regulations, to allow foreign students to stay in rural America for longer periods of time.