



National Association of Federally Impacted Schools

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On behalf of the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS), thank you for the opportunity to present and submit this statement to the February 15, 2019, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Listening Session. NAFIS represents the 1,200-plus Impact Aid-recipient school districts nationwide that together educate more than 10 million students. Impact Aid reimburses school districts for a loss of local revenue due to the presence of non-taxable federal property, such as Indian Trust, Treaty, and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act lands, military installations, low-rent housing and national parks and laboratories.

Nearly one in five U.S. students attend a rural school, and 53 percent of school districts in the U.S. are rural. Despite higher costs for school districts located in rural areas, only 17% of state funding on average is directed to rural districts.¹ Federally impacted schools are located largely in rural areas, and Impact Aid funding is essential to the operation of these school districts.

Invest in Agriculture Education: Agriculture is changing, with precision farming, artificial intelligence and robotics among the forces driving the transformation. To prepare students for careers in agricultural occupations, school districts across the country, and particularly in rural areas, need the resources to adapt their coursework and equipment to today's practices. Agriculture education programs typically rely on local school district funding and infrastructure to thrive. Investments are needed to maintain and strengthen these kinds of educational opportunities for students in federally impacted schools. School districts also partner with local organizations such as 4H and FFA.

Invest in Broadband: Many agriculture education programs rely on internet resources to offer students modern learning opportunities, which is difficult in many rural areas where access to high speed broadband is still out of reach or prohibitively expensive. Eighty percent of districts not meeting federal connectivity benchmarks are in rural areas. Many of these areas do not have access to broadband and are still using DSL and phone line-based internet providers. More investment in rural broadband access will help these schools access high-speed internet and the rich educational content available online.²

Invest in School Facilities: As a direct result of the presence of nontaxable federal property, federally impacted school districts have limited to no bonding capacity to raise funds to repair, modernize or build new school buildings. NAFIS identified more than \$4 billion in pressing construction needs from a survey of 218 federally impacted school districts in 37 states. Not

¹ AASA, The School Superintendents Association, "Leveling the Playing Field for Rural Students," 2017, http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Policy_and_Advocacy/Resources/AASA_Rural_Equity_Report_FINAL.pdf

² EducationSuperHighway, "2017 State of the States: Fulfilling Our Promise to America's Students," 2017, https://s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/esh-sots-pdfs/educationsuperhighway_2017_state_of_the_states.pdf

only do these districts lack the resources for technology and modernization to ensure all students have access to 21st century learning environments, they require additional resources to address health and safety code violations and capacity or overcrowding issues that come with educating students in buildings that are, in some cases, over 100 years old. School districts are operating with expired boilers, faulty fire alarm systems, overheated classrooms, leaky roofs, noisy HVAC systems, earthquake damage and coal furnaces.³

Combat Child Food Insecurity: Children in rural areas are more likely than other children to live in poverty; about one-quarter of children in rural areas were poor in 2015.⁴ Because of this, students in rural schools often rely on critical USDA programs such as the National School Lunch and Breakfast program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to access healthy meals. A student who arrives at school hungry cannot learn. These USDA programs are critical to the education and development of the children they serve. By providing these meals, the USDA is giving students in poverty a leg up and a chance to thrive.

³ National Association of Federally Impacted Schools, “Foundations for Learning: The Facilities Needs of Federally Impacted Schools,” 2017, <https://www.nafisdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2017-school-construction-report.pdf>

⁴ United States Census Bureau. “Summary File.” 2007-2008 American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey Office, 2013.