

STATE CHAIR PROFILE

Creating Pathways to Possibility

Dr. Andrea Simon | Superintendent, Mahnomen Public Schools (MN)

About the District

Mahnomen Public Schools is located on the White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota, and approximately 92% of our students are Native American. Because a significant portion of the property in and around our district is federally connected and not part of the traditional local tax base, Impact Aid is critically important to our ability to provide opportunities for students.

Our students and community are incredibly proud of Mahnomen, and our relationship with White Earth Nation is an important part of who we are. I'm especially proud of the work we're doing to expand career and technical education, work-based learning, and career pathways so our students can see meaningful opportunities for themselves both within our community and beyond it.



The Importance of Impact Aid

Impact Aid is not extra money for Mahnomen—it helps replace local revenue our district cannot generate because of federally impacted property. Those dollars support the everyday work of educating our students, from staffing and transportation to academic programs and student services. It gives us the flexibility to respond to the needs of our students in ways that more restrictive funding sources often do not.

An increase would allow us to invest more deeply in the programs, staff, facilities, and opportunities our students deserve. A significant cut would have a very real impact because there simply isn't an equivalent local tax base available to replace those dollars. For a small rural district like ours, losing federal support can quickly become a question of what opportunities we can continue providing students.

A Commitment to Community

I went into education because I wanted to work with kids and make a difference in the community where I lived. Over time, that grew into wanting to help create systems where students and staff have the support and opportunities they need to be successful.

Our students keep me motivated. As superintendent, I see every day how decisions made at the state and federal levels eventually show up in classrooms, on buses, in programs, and in the opportunities we can offer kids. Advocacy gives me an opportunity to make sure the voices of small, rural, federally impacted districts like Mahnomen are part of those conversations.

NAFIS gives districts like ours a collective voice that we simply wouldn't have on our own. Serving as Minnesota State Chair gives me an opportunity to advocate not only for Mahnomen, but also for other federally impacted districts across our state. I've really valued the relationships I've built through NAFIS and the opportunity to bring Mahnomen's story directly to policymakers in Washington, D.C.

> **"NAFIS gives districts like ours a collective voice that we simply wouldn't have on our own."**

What Policymakers Need to Know

Impact Aid is about keeping a federal commitment to communities whose ability to generate local revenue is affected by the federal presence. Our students deserve the same opportunities as students anywhere else, and federally impacted communities should not be disadvantaged simply because much of the land surrounding their schools cannot contribute to the local tax base in the same way. ◆



Simon in D.C. at a NAFIS Conference

> **"Impact Aid gives us the flexibility to respond to the needs of our students in ways that more restrictive funding sources often do not."**