

NREA PRESENTS NATIONAL FORUM
TO ADVANCE
RURAL
EDUCATION

OCTOBER 19-21, 2026
SAN ANTONIO
TX

PROGRAM



Hosted by:



In partnership
with:



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SUPPORT RURAL TEACHERS TODAY

Exceptional educators in rural communities transform lives with limited resources and unlimited heart. The NREA Foundation celebrates these incredible professionals through our Rural Teacher of the Year program.

Your impact doubles right now. An anonymous donor will match every dollar up to \$5,000—your \$50 becomes \$100, your \$250 becomes \$500. Reach our goal by December 31st and we'll have \$10,000 to support outstanding rural teachers today and for years to come.

These teachers deserve recognition for the magic they create in America's rural classrooms. Help us honor their dedication.



**Scan the QR code to
donate or visit the NREA
Foundation booth.**

NREA Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization.

EXPLORE SAN ANTONIO

Steeped in history and rich in culture, San Antonio offers a vibrant blend of tradition, flavor, and unforgettable experiences. As you attend the conference, take time to explore a city where heritage and hospitality come to life.

Stroll along the iconic San Antonio River Walk, lined with lively restaurants, shops, and scenic views, or step into history at The Alamo, one of the nation's most recognized landmarks. Discover art, culture, and local charm in the Pearl District, or savor the bold flavors of authentic Tex-Mex and regional cuisine throughout the city.

For those looking to explore beyond downtown, nearby parks and the Texas Hill Country offer opportunities for outdoor adventure and relaxation. Whether you're drawn to rich history, vibrant culture, or incredible food, San Antonio delivers an experience that extends well beyond the conference.

Explore all that San Antonio has to offer by visiting <https://www.visitsanantonio.com>

Welcome to San Antonio



SHOW US YOUR BADGE

For a list of the current offers:
Scan the QR Code or Go To:
VisitSanAntonio.com/SUYB



Explore San Antonio's rich
culinary and nightlife scene
Scan below to access:



**DOWNTOWN
DINING GUIDE**



**DOWNTOWN
NIGHTLIFE GUIDE**



**PEARL
DINING GUIDE**



**SOUTHTOWN
DINING GUIDE**

CONVENTION CENTER MAP

BALLROOM

Stars at Night Ballroom
HemisFair Ballrooms
Meeting Rooms 301-305



MEETING LEVEL

Meeting Rooms 205-225



STREET LEVEL

Exhibit Halls 1-4B
Bridge Hall
Lila Cockrell Theatre
Main Lobby/Business Center
West Lobby



RIVER LEVEL

Meeting Rooms 004-008
The LOB
Grotto



LEGEND

- Exhibit Halls
- Meeting Rooms
- Ballrooms
- Prefunction
- Restrooms
- Food Service
- Vertical Circulation

MARKET STREET



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TO ADVANCE
RURAL
EDUCATION

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BRONZE



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HOSTED BY



NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (NREA) is the voice of all rural schools and rural communities across the United States. NREA was originally founded as the Department of Rural Education in 1907. It is the oldest established national organization of its kind in the United States. Through the years it has evolved as a strong and respected organization of rural school administrators, teachers, board members, regional service agency personnel, researchers, business and industry representatives, and others interested in maintaining the vitality of rural school systems across the country. Learn more at nrea.net.

Hosted in Partnership With



Established in 1992, TREA is a statewide organization that promotes quality educational opportunities and experiences for all children from rural public schools which will enable them to live and compete in a global society. TREA Exists to: Support and Collaborate, Provide a Variety of Services/Benefits, Advocate for Rural Schools, Be a Source for Superintendents, and Provide Leadership Opportunities. Learn more at www.txrea.com.

#RuralEdForum

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES



Early Registration & Welcome Party

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18 • 4:30-6 P.M. • MEETING LEVEL

Meet fellow attendees, grab a drink, and set the tone for an unforgettable week.

Lunch on Your Own

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19 • 12-1:15 P.M.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20 • 12:30-2 P.M.

Take a break and enjoy lunch on your own at one of the many nearby restaurants along the San Antonio River Walk. It's a great opportunity to explore the area, connect with colleagues, and enjoy some of the local flavor before afternoon sessions resume.

Attendee Reception

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19 • 5-6:30 P.M. • MEETING LEVEL

Mix, mingle, and toast to a great conference with snacks, drinks, music, and plenty of conversation.

Sponsored by: **T-Mobile**

Coffee & Networking

MEETING LEVEL

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19 • 7:30-8:30 A.M.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20 • 8-9 A.M.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21 • 8-9 A.M.

Breakfast and lunch are not provided.

OTHER ATTENDEE EXPERIENCES



Service Project

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20 • 8-9 A.M. • MEETING LEVEL

Join fellow conference attendees for a hands-on service project in partnership with Communities In Schools of San Antonio, assembling hygiene kits for local students. Completed kits will support students in Uvalde, Somerset, Kerrville, and a San Antonio school.

Sponsored by:



Poster Sessions

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20 • 2-4 P.M. • MEETING ROOM 205

Poster sessions offer an abbreviated way to engage with presenters to learn about research and/or promising practices in rural education.

Free Souvenir Photo

MEETING LEVEL

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18 • 4:30-6 P.M.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19 • 7:30 A.M.-6:30 P.M.

Sponsored by:



Charging Stations

MEETING LEVEL

Sponsored by:



SCHEDULE

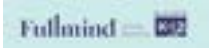
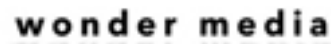
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18

4:30-6 p.m. Early Registration & Welcome Party Meeting Level

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19

7:30-8:30 a.m. Registration, Coffee & Networking Meeting Level
8:30-10 a.m. General Session: Opening & Welcome Remarks Hemisfair Ballroom
Keynote: Thomas Murray
Sponsored by:  **UNLIMITED INSTRUCTION**
10:15-11 a.m. Learning Sessions
11:15 a.m.-12 p.m. Learning Sessions
12-1:15 p.m. Lunch Break (*On Your Own*)
1:15-2 p.m. Learning Sessions
2:15-3 p.m. Learning Sessions
3:15-4 p.m. Learning Sessions
4:15-5 p.m. Learning Sessions
5-6:30 p.m. Attendee Reception. Meeting Level
Sponsored by: 

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

8-9 a.m. Service Project Meeting Level
Sponsored by: 
8-9 a.m. Coffee & Networking Meeting Level
9-10:30 a.m. General Session: NREA Awards &
2026 Teacher of the Year, Jennifer Burdette Hemisfair Ballroom
Keynote: Dr. PJ Caposey
Sponsored by:  **VEREGY**
10:45-11:30 a.m. Learning Sessions
11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Learning Sessions
12:30-2 p.m. Lunch Break (*On Your Own*)
2-2:45 p.m. Learning Sessions
2-4 p.m. Poster Sessions Room 205
3-3:45 p.m. Learning Sessions
4-5 p.m. Voices at the Table Policy Forum Room 214
Sponsored by:  **ThoughtExchange**
4-5 p.m. Understanding the Science of Animated Hemisfair Ballroom
Storytelling to Protect Children
Sponsored by: 

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

8-9 a.m. Coffee & Networking Meeting Level
9 a.m.-12 p.m. Rural Innovation & Impact Showcase Room 214
Sponsored by:  **CollegeBoard**

EXHIBITORS

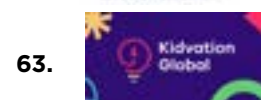
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18 • 4:30-6 P.M.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19 • 7:30 A.M.-6:30 P.M.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20 • 7:30 A.M.-4 P.M.

MEETING LEVEL

NATIONAL FORUM
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GENERAL SESSION

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19

NATIONAL FORUM
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9-10 A.M. • HEMISFAIR BALLROOM, BALLROOM LEVEL



THOMAS MURRAY

Director of Innovation, Future Ready Schools & Best-Selling Author

KEYNOTE: How You Show Up: Creating Schools Where People and Opportunity Thrive

In rural schools, leadership is deeply personal. Relationships are at the heart of every decision, schools serve as the center of their communities, and the way leaders show up each day shapes far more than a single classroom; *it influences an entire community*. While today's educators face increasing complexity, uncertainty, and constant change, the most effective leaders understand that their greatest influence isn't found in a new initiative or program. It's found in how they show up for others every single day.

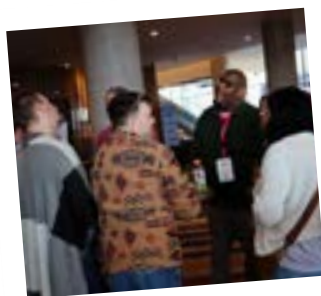
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ATTENDEE RECEPTION

5-6:30 P.M. • MEETING LEVEL

Sponsored by: 

All attendees are invited to mix and mingle during our attendee reception. Grab a drink and a few appetizers and connect with new and old friends.





Next-gen learning starts with 5G.

Your educators should focus on student growth not tech limitations. Reliable 5G keeps operations running smoothly so they can teach, not troubleshoot.

Discover how T-Mobile supports education at [T-Mobile.com/Education](https://www.t-mobile.com/education)



GENERAL SESSIONS

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20



2026 RURAL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

9-9:30 A.M. • HEMISFAIR BALLROOM, BALLROOM LEVEL



JENNIFER BURDETTE

Teacher, Spoon River Valley CUSD #4
London Mills, Illinois

A lifelong advocate for the power of rural education, Jennifer has built her career around creating meaningful learning experiences, developing student leaders, and demonstrating the impact educators from small communities can have.

After earning a degree in history and teaching certification from Monmouth College, Jennifer began her career at Avon High School before joining Spoon River Valley High School, where she has taught for the past 15 years. In addition to teaching, she serves as an instructional coach and holds numerous leadership and student-focused roles across the district.

Jennifer's influence extends well beyond her school community. She has led professional learning, supported educators as an Illinois Civics mentor, facilitated the national Guardians of Democracy program, and contributed to initiatives with Retro Report, Statistics in Schools, CIRCLE at Tufts University, the Museum of Tolerance, and the Smithsonian.

Her commitment to civic learning, instructional leadership, and student engagement earned her the 2024 Carolyn Pereira Civic Leadership Award and recognition as a ROE 26 Champion of Education & Educator of the Year Finalist.

9:30-10:30 A.M. • HEMISFAIR BALLROOM, BALLROOM LEVEL



DR. PJ CAPOSEY

Superintendent, Oregon CUSD 220 & Best-Selling Author

KEYNOTE: If Not Us, Who? If Not Now, When?

Rural educators carry more weight with fewer resources than almost anyone in this profession. This session is the wake-up call and the pep talk rolled into one. PJ makes the case that the people in this room are exactly who kids need, and right now is exactly when they need it. Whether you're leading a classroom, leading a building, shaping policy, or preparing the next generation of educators, you'll walk away with a sharper sense of why this work matters and what to do about it Monday morning. Teachers especially will feel like someone finally said the quiet part out loud. It's fast, it's funny, and it hits hard. This isn't inspiration for inspiration's sake. Walk away with real tools, real moves, things you can put

to work the second they're back in their building. This is a session about taking back American public education, one practical step at a time, and proving it can still reach the potential we all know it has.

Sponsored by:  **VEREGY**
Simplifying and Accelerating Your Energy Transition.

FEATURED SESSIONS

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

NATIONAL FORUM
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VOICES AT THE TABLE POLICY FORUM

4-5 P.M. • ROOM 214, MEETING LEVEL

Every voice matters—and every voice has a seat at the table.

The Voices at the Table Policy Forum is your opportunity to help shape NREA's national advocacy agenda. In the weeks leading up to the Forum, registered attendees were invited to share the challenges, opportunities, and priorities facing their schools and communities through a national ThoughtExchange. Those insights will serve as the foundation for this interactive session, ensuring the conversation in San Antonio reflects what rural educators across the country say matters most.

During the Forum, you'll engage in two rounds of facilitated table discussions with fellow attendees. NREA Board, Legislative Committee, and Research Committee members will rotate among tables to guide conversations, dig deeper, and capture key insights. Ideas from each discussion will be synthesized in real time and carried forward to help inform NREA's advocacy priorities and future policy work.

Sponsored by:  ThoughtExchange



4-5 P.M. • HEMISFAIR BALLROOM, BALLROOM LEVEL



TERRY THOREN

CEO & President, Wonder Media Education

**Understanding the Science of Animated Storytelling to Protect Children
Engage Minds. Build Resilience. Inspire Conversations.**

Discover how the power of animated storytelling can help educators engage students in meaningful conversations about difficult topics while strengthening social-emotional learning and resilience.

Through live demonstrations and real-world implementation examples, participants will explore the research behind why animation is such an effective teaching tool and learn practical strategies for integrating these resources into classroom instruction and counseling settings. Attendees will leave with a collection of free, ready-to-use lessons and activities developed by child advocates, therapists, and nationally recognized scholars.

The animated resources were produced by Terry Thoren, former CEO of Klasky Csupo—the award-winning animation studio behind beloved family favorites Rugrats and The Wild Thornberrys.

Sponsored by: **wonder media**

GENERAL SESSION

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

RURAL INNOVATION & IMPACT SHOWCASE 9 A.M.-12 P.M. • ROOM 214, MEETING LEVEL

Where Rural Innovation Takes Center Stage

The Rural Innovation & Impact Showcase debuts in 2026 as a new signature Forum experience, celebrating the bold ideas and measurable results emerging from rural schools and organizations across the nation. Selected from nearly 50 submissions nationwide, five finalists will present innovative solutions that are transforming student learning, strengthening communities, and tackling some of rural education's most pressing challenges.

More than a showcase, this interactive experience gives you the opportunity to engage directly with the finalists through facilitated conversations exploring implementation strategies, lessons learned, and practical ideas you can adapt in your own school or district. The session concludes with the live announcement of the 2026 Rural Innovation & Impact Showcase Winner, celebrating one outstanding innovation while recognizing the creativity and impact of rural educators across America.

Meet the 2026 Finalists

MONITEAU COUNTY R-V SCHOOL (MISSOURI)

From Screens to Soil: Place-based experiential learning that connects science, agriculture, and social-emotional learning.

KENTUCKY EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (KENTUCKY)

Tables Turned, Futures Earned: A reverse career fair empowering students with disabilities to showcase their skills to employers.

NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (WISCONSIN)

Building Career Pathways for Native American Student Success: An innovative workforce development model connecting education, industry, and tribal communities.

PIKEVILLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS & DIGITAL PROMISE (KENTUCKY)

Drawing on Kinship: Blending Appalachian heritage with computer science to create culturally responsive STEM learning.

LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT & CAROLINA COLLABORATIVE FOR ALTERNATIVE PREPARATION (SOUTH CAROLINA)

Building Capacity from Within: A coaching-centered teacher preparation model strengthening teacher recruitment, retention, and instructional leadership.

Sponsored by:  CollegeBoard



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Read more about our finalists and their innovative ideas and solutions.



NOTES

Great Schools Need Great Educators. Their Benefits Should Reflect That.

Rising healthcare costs shouldn't force rural districts to compromise on teacher compensation. Apollo helps school leaders rethink employee benefits—modernizing coverage options without cutting people or plans to keep district budgets sustainable.

Scan to learn more!



Educator-Centric Plan Design:

Strategic plan design and proactive strategies built to protect staff health without annual renewal spikes.



Solutions for Educator Families:

Finally, real solutions for spouses and dependents who are overpaying on their health insurance.



Year-Round Staff Advocacy:

Hands-on claims advocacy, employee education, and administrative support that continues long after open enrollment ends.

Rethink what's possible for your district's benefits.

Scan the QR code or visit apollo-insurance.com/nrea to explore district solutions or connect with our team.





Save the Dates

OCTOBER 14-16, 2027

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

