

NREA PRESENTS

NATIONAL FORUM
TO ADVANCE
RURAL
EDUCATION

OCTOBER 19-21, 2026
SAN ANTONIO
TX 

REGISTER NOW

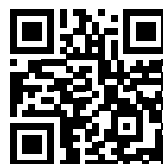
Register by October 2, 2026



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JOIN US

FOR THE NATION'S PREMIER RURAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

NREA PRESENTS
NATIONAL FORUM
TO ADVANCE
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The National Forum to Advance Rural Education isn't just a conference—it's a dynamic, high-energy experience where passion fuels innovation and ideas spark real change. Get ready for three days packed with inspiring keynotes, engaging learning sessions, and powerful networking opportunities, all designed to spark new ideas and tackle the unique challenges and opportunities of rural education.

Whether you're an educator, researcher, policymaker, or advocate, this is your chance to connect with visionary leaders, groundbreaking thinkers, and dedicated changemakers who are shaping the future of rural education.

This year's conference theme, *Ready, Set, Rural: Creating Opportunity Everywhere*, is a call to action. It reflects the readiness and resilience of rural educators and the growing momentum across rural schools and communities. With the right partnerships and practices, rural education can expand access, strengthen equity, and prepare students not only for future careers, but for meaningful engagement in their communities and beyond.

If you share our passion and excitement, San Antonio is the place to be!

Let's learn, connect, and transform the future—together!
See you October 19-21, 2026.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- Rural district, building, and teacher leaders
- Business, civic, and community leaders
- State department of education leaders
- Local, state, and national boards of education leaders
- Established collaboratives/networks of education, business, and community organizations
- Economic development leaders and venture capitalists
- Rural and non-rural education associations
- Philanthropic organizations
- Leaders from institutes of higher education
- Others interested in strengthening rural education, economic/workforce development, and civic/community engagement effort



"This conference has been one of the most beneficial conferences I have attended over my career."



"This is the fifth year I have attended the conference and it is always inspiring and exciting!"



"Everything was amazing—from the location, keynote speakers, and breakout sessions. Looking forward to future conferences."



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#RuralEdForum

SCHEDULE

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18

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

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19

7:30-8:30 a.m. Registration, Coffee & Networking
8:30-10 a.m. General Session: Opening & Welcome Remarks
Keynote: Tom Murray
10:15-11 a.m. Learning Sessions
11:15 a.m.-12 p.m. Learning Sessions
12-1:15 p.m. Lunch Break
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

Sponsored by: **T-Mobile**

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

7:30-8:30 a.m. Service Project
Sponsored by: **Fullmind** is now home to **ELEVATE K-12**
8-9 a.m. Coffee & Networking
9-10:30 a.m. NREA Awards & 2026 Teacher of the Year
Keynote: Dr. PJ Caposey
10:45-11:30 a.m. Learning Sessions
11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Learning Sessions
12:30-1:45 p.m. Lunch Break
2-2:45 p.m. Learning Sessions
2-4 p.m. Poster Sessions
3-3:45 p.m. Learning Sessions
4-5 p.m. Voices at the Table Policy Forum

Sponsored by: **ThoughtExchange**

4-5 p.m. Understanding the Science of Animated
Storytelling to Protect Children

Sponsored by: **wonder media**

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

8-9 a.m. Coffee & Networking
9 a.m.-12 p.m. Rural Innovation & Showcase Competition

Sponsored by: **CollegeBoard**



GENERAL SESSIONS

MONDAY, OCTOBER 19



TOM MURRAY

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

Tom Murray is a nationally recognized leader in educational innovation and a trusted voice on future-ready learning. A former teacher, principal, and district leader, he is grounded in real-world experience helping schools design student-centered systems that prepare learners for success. He has testified before Congress and partnered with the White House, U.S. Department of Education, and districts nationwide to advance meaningful change. A best-selling ASCD author and dynamic keynote speaker, Tom delivers engaging, actionable insights on leadership, culture, and innovation. He equips educators with practical strategies to create authentic learning experiences and build sustainable systems that support every learner—regardless of district size or setting.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20



DR. PJ CAPOSEY

Superintendent, Oregon CUSD 220 & Best-selling Author

PJ Caposey is a nationally recognized leader in public education and the most published sitting superintendent in the country. As superintendent of a rural Illinois district, he has led nationally recognized school transformation, earning honors for innovation, governance, and student success. A former Illinois Superintendent of the Year and national finalist, PJ is a best-selling author and dynamic keynote speaker known for delivering practical, results-driven strategies. His work—featured in *The Washington Post* and NPR—focuses on leadership, school culture, and continuous improvement. Grounded in real-world experience, PJ equips educators with actionable ideas to strengthen systems, support students, and drive meaningful change in communities of any size.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20



TERRY THOREN

CEO & President, Wonder Media Education

Wonder Media's founder, Terry Thoren, set out on a mission 15 years ago to use animation to help prevent childhood trauma. He is the former CEO of Klasky Csupo, Inc., the company that incubated *The Simpsons* and produced *Rugrats*, *The Wild Thornberrys*, *Rocket Power*, and more. Wonder Media has produced animated resources for the Child Rescue Service in Ukraine, the Global Institute for Habits of Mind, the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center Foundation, the Cook Center for Human Connection, the Betty Ford Children's Center, the Hero in You Foundation, the NALC Food Drive, The Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of America, and the Wyland Water Foundation.

NEW FOR 2026

INCLUDED WITH YOUR REGISTRATION

This year, your conference registration includes three new program experiences designed to deepen engagement and impact.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 4-5 P.M.

VOICES AT THE TABLE POLICY FORUM

Your Voice. Our Agenda. National Impact.

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. Beginning September 1, registered attendees will be invited into a national ThoughtExchange, where they can share the challenges, opportunities, and priorities facing their schools and communities. The insights gathered will become the foundation for this interactive session, ensuring the conversation in San Antonio begins with 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 as NREA Board members, Legislative Committee members, and Research Committee members rotate among tables to guide conversations, ask deeper questions, and capture key insights. Ideas from every discussion will be synthesized in real time and carried forward to help inform NREA's advocacy priorities and future policy work.

This isn't just a discussion about policy—it's an opportunity to help shape it.

Sponsored by:  ThoughtExchange



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 4-5 P.M.

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**



NEW FOR 2026

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 9 A.M.-12 P.M.

RURAL INNOVATION & IMPACT SHOWCASE

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.

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REGISTRATION & HOTEL INFORMATION

WHAT'S INCLUDED WITH REGISTRATION— PLUS WHAT'S NEW FOR 2026

In 2026, you'll experience a mix of new offerings and thoughtful updates designed to create more opportunities for connection throughout the conference:

- **Three new signature experiences:** The Rural Innovation & Impact Showcase, Voices at the Table Policy Forum, and Understanding the Science of Animated Storytelling to Protect Children—bring fresh ideas, interactive learning, and meaningful conversations to the 2026 Forum.
- **Extended lunch time (75 minutes):** Built-in time to connect with colleagues and explore the San Antonio River Walk, with a wide range of dining options just steps from the venue
- **Flexible, focused mornings:** We've prioritized programming over traditional catering—offering coffee and water on-site, with convenient grab-and-go breakfast options available throughout the hotel and nearby

[LEARN MORE AND REGISTER](#)

Registration Type	Early Bird Rate <i>By Jul. 19</i>	Regular Rate <i>By Sept. 19</i>	Late Rate <i>After Sept. 19</i>
NREA Member	\$550	\$600	\$700
Non-Member	\$650	\$700	\$800
Presenter	\$500	\$500	\$500
Student	\$250	\$250	\$250
Lifetime NREA Member	Complimentary	Complimentary	Complimentary

Note: Membership status will be verified upon registration. The rate applicable to your verified membership status at the time of registration will be applied.

REGISTER BY OCTOBER 2, 2026

HOTELS

[San Antonio Marriott Rivercenter](#)

101 Bowie Street, San Antonio, TX 78205

Phone: 210-223-1000

Rate: \$269/night + fees/taxes

[San Antonio Marriott Riverwalk](#)

889 East Market Street, San Antonio, TX 78205

Phone: 210-224-4555

Rate: \$269/night + fees/taxes

CANCELLATION POLICY

Cancellations refer to the cancellation of a conference registration in its entirety.

Early Bird & Regular Registrations

Attendees who registered at the Early Bird or Regular Rate may request a cancellation by September 28, 2026 and will receive a refund minus a \$100 cancellation fee. If paid by purchase order, the P.O. processing fee will not be refunded. Cancellation requests received on or after September 29, 2026 will not be refunded.

Late Registrations (After September 19)

Registrations purchased at the Late Rate are non-refundable at the time of purchase, regardless of when the cancellation request is received.

No-shows

Registrants who do not attend the conference are not eligible for a refund regardless of registration type or timing.

Check refunds will be processed post-conference.

QUESTIONS?

Contact the event team at nfare@nrea.site.

EXPLORE SAN ANTONIO

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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



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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.

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Learn more at www.nrea.net/event-sponsors or contact Dr. Melissa Sadorff, Executive Director, NREA at melissa@nrea.net.

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