

2026 ISBA RESOLUTION NO. 2 (Proposed)

AMEND IDAHO CODE 33-319 TO BROADEN THE DEFINITION OF RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

WHEREAS, Idaho Code 33-319 currently defines a rural school district as one with either fewer than 20 enrolled students per square mile, or located in a county with fewer than 25,000 residents based on the most recent decennial census;

WHEREAS, this statutory definition no longer accurately reflects the geographic, demographic, and economic realities of many Idaho school districts that experience rural challenges despite narrowly exceeding current thresholds;

WHEREAS, increasing the enrolled student threshold from fewer than 20 to fewer than 25 students per square mile would more accurately include school districts that operate in sparsely populated areas but are currently excluded;

WHEREAS, increasing the county population threshold from 25,000 to 30,000 residents would allow more counties with geographically dispersed populations and limited resources to qualify for rural designation;

WHEREAS, the current limitations may exclude districts that are in need of additional rural support and flexibility in areas such as educator recruitment, transportation, funding, and technology infrastructure;

WHEREAS, amending the statute would better align the rural designation with districts' lived experiences and needs, allowing for more equitable access to state programs and policy considerations designed for rural education environments;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Idaho School Boards Association shall work with the Idaho Legislature to amend Idaho Code 33-319 to redefine a "rural school district" as one with fewer than 25 enrolled students per square mile or located in a county with fewer than 30,000 residents, as determined by the most recent decennial census.

Statement of Purpose

The current statutory definition of a rural school district under Idaho Code 33-319 is overly narrow and excludes districts that, while just over the threshold, face the same operational and fiscal challenges as those already designated rural. This resolution urges the Idaho Legislature to modernize this definition to reflect changing demographics and realities of school district operation across the state, thereby improving equitable access to rural-designated supports.

Submitted by Fruitland School District

**ISBA Executive Board Recommendation: NO RECOMMENDATION
(NEUTRAL)**

Leslie Baker, ISBA Region 9 Vice Chair, will present the Executive Board recommendation at the business session.

“Under the current definition of rural school districts, 80% qualify. However, with exploding growth in Idaho, several counties are likely to lose their rural designation within the next five years. The Executive Board has concerns that increased expansion of the definition may take away from districts that have a drastically smaller population. However, financial benefits are lost as populations continue to rise and school districts lose their rural status. The neutral recommendation provides the sponsors the ability to make their case to the membership during the business session.”