SB 217-FN-A - AS INTRODUCED

2023 SESSION

SENATE BILL 217-FN-A

AN ACT establishing a rural and underserved area educator incentive program for higher education and making an appropriation therefor.


COMMITTEE: Education

ANALYSIS

This bill establishes the rural and underserved area educator incentive program and makes an appropriation therefor.

Explanation: Matter added to current law appears in bold italics. Matter removed from current law appears [in brackets and struckthrough.] Matter which is either (a) all new or (b) repealed and reenacted appears in regular type.
STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Twenty Three

AN ACT establishing a rural and underserved area educator incentive program for higher education and making an appropriation therefor.

Be it Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court convened:

1 New Section; Department of Education; Rural and Underserved Area Educator Incentive Program. Amend RSA 21-N by inserting after section 8-b the following new section:

21-N:8-c Rural and Underserved Area Educator Incentive Program.

I. In this section:

(a) “Department” means the department of education.

(b) “Division” means the division of educator support and higher education.

(c) “Commission” means the New Hampshire higher education commission.

(d) “Educational loans” means all loans made pursuant to a federal loan program, except federal parent loans for undergraduate students (PLUS), as provided in 20 U.S.C. section 1078-2.

(e) “Eligible educational expenses” means any outstanding loans payments made during the school year.


(g) "Rural and underserved area educator" means a full-time, credentialed individual employed as an instructional or pupil service employee in an eligible public school district or at an eligible chartered public school.

(h) "Rural school district" means:

(1) There are fewer than 20 enrolled students per square mile within the area encompassed by the school district’s boundaries; or

(2) The regional public health network in which a plurality of the school district’s market value for assessment purposes is located is deemed rural as defined by the department of health and human services, division of public health.

II. The department shall identify specific schools that are affected by critical educator shortages using the following criteria:

(a) Rural isolation of the school; or

(b) Economic disadvantage of the school based on eligibility for funds pursuant to title I, part A of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended.

III. Rural and underserved area educators who are employed at schools identified in paragraph II shall be eligible for repayment of all or part of any such educator’s outstanding


educational loans existing at the time of application in accordance with the eligibility and award criteria established in this section up to the amount specified in this section, or repayment of eligible education expenses established by the commission, and in rules adopted by the commission pursuant to RSA 541-A.

IV. Loan repayment assistance or the reimbursement of eligible education expenses may be provided on behalf of a rural and underserved area educator who:
   (a) Is employed in a school identified in paragraph II;
   (b) Has a signed contract with such school; and
   (c) Has an educational loan that is not in default and that has a minimum unpaid current balance of at least $1,000 or has at least $1,000 in eligible education expenses at the time of application; or
   (d) Has eligible education expenses that may be reimbursed pursuant to this section.

V. To qualify for loan repayment assistance or education expense reimbursement under this section, a rural and underserved area educator shall submit an application to the commission. For loan repayment applications, the application shall include official verification or proof of the applicant's total unpaid accumulated educational loan debt and any other documentation as required by the department for verification of the applicant's eligibility.

VI. A rural and underserved area educator shall be eligible for loan repayment assistance or eligible educational expenses for up to 4 years, provided that the educator remains employed at the same school or by the same school district. The department may remit payment of the loan on behalf of the rural and underserved area educator in accordance with the requirements of this section and rules adopted by the commission.

VII. The total incentive award shall be:
   (a) In the amount of $1,500 for the first year;
   (b) In the amount of $2,500 for the second year;
   (c) In the amount of $3,500 for the third year; and
   (d) In the amount of $4,500 for the fourth year.

VIII. The commission shall adopt rules pursuant to RSA 541-A to establish protocols for determining the number of incentive awards that will be made annually based on available appropriations for the program.

IX. Incentive awards under this section shall be offered to the extent of available funding.

2 Rural and Underserved Area Educator Incentive Program; Appropriation. There is hereby appropriated the sum of $1,000,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024 and the sum of $2,000,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025 to the department of education, division of educator support and higher education, for the purpose of funding the rural and underserved area educator incentive program established in RSA 21-N:8-c. All funds appropriated for the program
shall be nonlapsing. The governor is authorized to draw a warrant for said sums out of any money
in the treasury not otherwise appropriated.

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3  Effective Date.

I. Section 2 of this act shall take effect July 1, 2023.

II. The remainder of this act shall take effect upon its passage.
AN ACT establishing a rural and underserved educator incentive program for higher education and making an appropriation therefor.

FISCAL IMPACT:  [ X ] State  [ ] County  [ ] Local  [ ] None

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<th>STATE:</th>
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Funding Source:  [ X ] General  [ ] Education  [ ] Highway  [ ] Other

METHODOLOGY:
This bill creates a rural and underserved education incentive program, to be administered by the Department of Education, and appropriates general funds of $1,000,000 in FY 2024 and $2,000,000 in FY 2025. The Department has not identified any costs relative to administration of this program and it is assumed all funds will be distributed in the fiscal year appropriated.

AGENCIES CONTACTED:
Department of Education