

# “Organized Voices for Rural Northern California Youth”



**Bode Gower**  
Chair, Northern California Youth  
Policy Coalition

# Who is Bode Gower? - Rural Youth Advocate

- Senior at Ukiah High School
- Associated Student Body President
- Founder and Chair of the Northern California Youth Policy Coalition
- Director of Policy for GENup
- Member of Senator Laphonza Butler's Youth Advisory Council
- Host of Gower Hour on KZYX
- Consultant for Political Campaigns, Businesses, and School Districts





# Why Did I Get Involved?



# Engaging Rural Youth in Policy

## Engage

Engaging youth in policy discussions fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, encouraging them to actively contribute to solutions that address their community's challenges and aspirations.

## Empower

Many rural youth feel like their voices don't matter so it's important to empower them and make them feel like their voices matter, because they do!

## Elevate

By advocating for the needs and priorities of rural youth, we aim to create positive change that uplifts our region and fosters a sense of representation and fairness for all. Through increased representation and dedicated efforts, we can pave the way for a brighter future for Northern California and its youth.





# NCYPC

Northern California Youth Policy Coalition



# Our Mission

We seek to give a voice to rural youth who feel unheard and a platform to come together to advocate for issues that are most important to our youth in Northern California.



# What We Do

The Northern California Youth Policy Coalition brings youth into the political discussion by advocating for their needs. We ensure that youth voices are heard, especially in matters that directly involve our community, and in doing so, we empower youth to create a brighter future for Northern California.

# How We Are Going to Achieve Our Goal

1. Advocate for the perspectives of Northern California youth through direct legislative action, including introducing and supporting legislation at both a federal and state level.
2. Through recruitment of active high school students, we are going to form a grassroots coalition of dedicated high school students to highlight the perspectives of youth in Northern California.
3. By actively engaging in our communities through organizing civic activities, we will increase the amount of young people who are actively involved in our communities.



# What We've Done

- ★ Advocated on over 20 pieces of legislation in Sacramento
  - SB 721 (Dahle) - Promoting CTE Programs In Our Schools
- ★ Advocated for two pieces of legislation in Washington DC
  - Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act of 2023
  - IDEA Full Funding Act
- ★ Hosted multiple candidate forums for local and state legislative offices
- ★ Registered hundreds of people to vote/pre-register to vote

# Current Broadband Statistics

## Rural Access Disparities

Approximately 25% of rural Americans and 10% of Californians lack reliable broadband access, significantly hindering educational and economic opportunities. This gap highlights the urgent need for infrastructure improvements to ensure equitable access to essential online resources for rural communities compared to their urban counterparts.



## Impact on Education


Limited broadband access adversely affects students in rural areas, with many unable to complete assignments or participate in online learning. This digital divide contributes to lower enrollment rates in higher education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting future opportunities for rural youth.




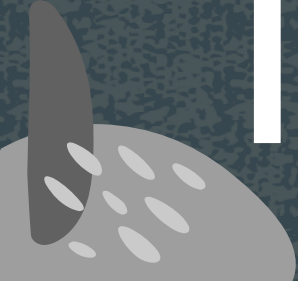
# Impact of COVID-19 on Broadband Accessibility



- The pandemic has accelerated the dependence on broadband for essential services, including education and healthcare, revealing the critical need for reliable internet access in rural areas to support remote learning and telehealth initiatives.
  - The exacerbation of the broadband divide during COVID-19 highlights the urgent need for targeted policy interventions and infrastructure investments to ensure equitable access to high-speed internet, particularly for underserved rural communities.
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“Broadband is no longer a luxury - it’s a necessity”





# Washington DC Advocacy

- Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act of 2023
- IDEA Full Funding Act
- Met with over 20 congressional offices
- Pushed for the passage of IDEA and SRS to ensure a quality education for rural schools



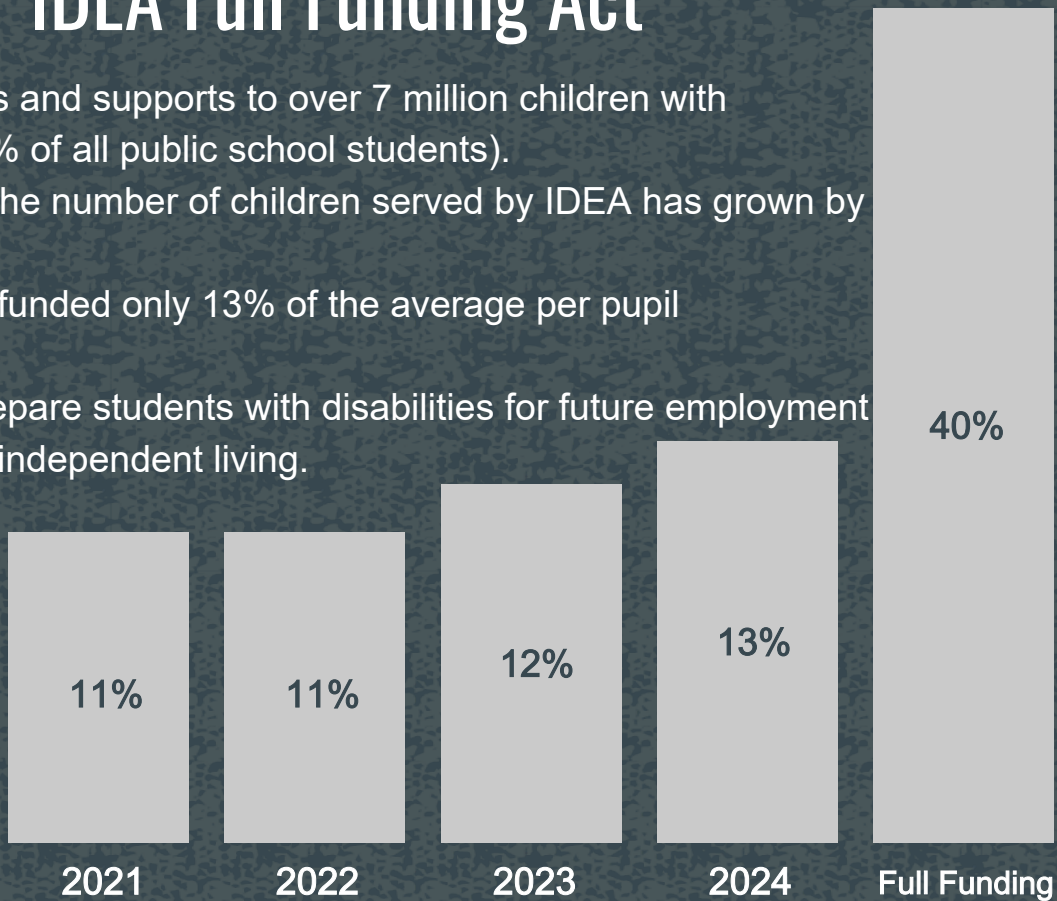
# Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act

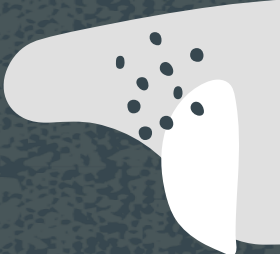
- Extend Secure Rural Schools through 2026
- Ensuring a predictable payment to federally impacted forest counties where the tax base is lower, impacting vital services to the community.
- Providing funding for educational services for students in more than 700 rural counties.
- Preventing the closure of remote rural schools serving small communities and the layoffs of school staff and other public service workers.
- This legislation funds important infrastructure projects, public education, law enforcement, and other essential services to ensure no one in timber-dependent communities gets left behind. I'm proud to help lead this bipartisan bill to reauthorize the SRS program, protect these resources, and further invest in our rural communities.




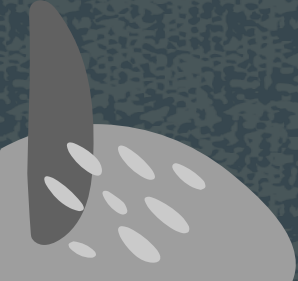
# IDEA Full Funding Act

- IDEA provides services and supports to over 7 million children with disabilities (around 13% of all public school students).
- Over the last decade, the number of children served by IDEA has grown by 12%
- In FY 2023, Congress funded only 13% of the average per pupil expenditures.
- Help schools better prepare students with disabilities for future employment and an opportunity for independent living.





# How “WE” can Engage, Elevate, and Empower Youth





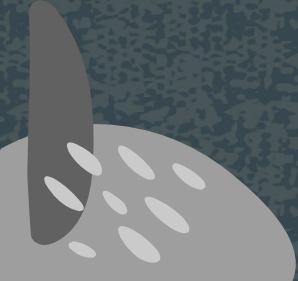

# “What’s the point of even getting involved?”

There’s a consensus amongst youth is that they’re not 18 yet, so they can’t affect change.


- A lot of young people feel like their voices don’t matter and that politics is run by older people.
- Many young people don’t even know the basics of politics/ how to get involved
- Where are the resources and opportunities to get involved for youth?

# How “WE” Can Get Young People Involved

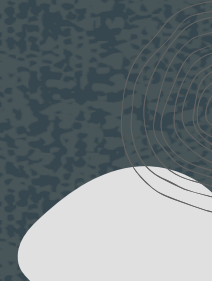



- Social Media
  - Civics Teachers
  - Talk About Issues We Care About
  - Engage with Us
  - Talk to Youth Organizations
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Engaging youth in policy is kind of like making a good smoothie. You need a mix of ingredients, some blending, and a lot of passion to get it right.



# THANK YOU!

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