



DEVELOPMENTS IN RURAL EDUCATION POLICY & RESEARCH October 2014

Funding Opportunities for Rural Education Reimagining the Delta Workforce

The Delta Regional Authority has made \$1.7 million available for the “Reimagining the Delta Workforce: Workforce Development Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Fund.” Awards will be made to rural counties and parishes in Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. Funding is intended to help local communities build a connected workforce system between businesses/industry and local education systems. Grantee projects should focus on three ideas: reimagining readiness, reengaging adult learners and disconnected youth, and realigning relationships and resources.

State entities, local municipalities, public bodies, and nonprofits may apply. Organizations are encouraged to collaborate with each other and other regional or community organizations. Awards range from \$50,000 (single county) to \$150,000 (multi-county partnerships).

Application deadline: November 10, 2014.

Application information can be found [here](#).

AgriBank Rural Community Grant Fund – Western North Dakota

AgriBank of North Dakota offers grants of up to \$50,000 to “facilitate improvement and/or development initiatives” in several areas including K-12 education. The organization accepts applications on an ongoing basis with three review periods per year.

Application deadlines: April 30, August 31, and November 30.

Application information can be found [here](#).

Blandin Foundation Major Grants – Minnesota

The Blandin Foundation of Minnesota offers grants in several areas, but its Major Grants program offers significant funding that may be used for education. Priority for these grants, which range from \$50,001 to \$250,000, is given to projects that demonstrate inter-relationships between “economy, education, and inclusivity” as well as those that show improved educational outcomes for populations that have faced historical barriers to success or expanded relationships between educational systems, employers, and parents. Applicants must be a registered 501(c)3 in the state of Minnesota, a tribal government, or a government entity.

Applications are reviewed four times per year, and applicants are encouraged to send a letter of inquiry before submitting a full application.

Application deadlines: March 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15.

Application information can be found [here](#).

A brief overview of the Blandin Foundation's grant programs can be found [here](#).

Research, Commentary, or Other Developments in Rural Education

Early Experiences Implementing Voluntary School District Mergers in Vermont

John D. Rogers, Talia J. Glesner, Herman W. Meyers

Journal of Research in Rural Education, September 2014

[Article](#)

This article describes the effects of an initiative to encourage voluntary education mergers in Vermont. One of the nation's most rural states, Vermont has the smallest districts in the United States. It also has some of the highest per-pupil costs, which increased by 57 percent from 1997-2001. In 2009, the Vermont legislature passed Act 153 to address the rising cost of education by encouraging voluntary mergers between districts and attempting to consolidate administrative services between existing district groups (called "supervisory unions"). Under Act 153, all districts and supervisory unions in the state were required to consider district mergers in the year following enactment.

Districts or supervisory unions that merged were eligible for a number of incentives, including a temporary break in property taxes, facilitation grants, and up to \$20,000 for legal and consulting fees. A revised version of the bill, passed in 2011, provided additional funding and incentives. In addition, while the original legislation stipulated that mergers could only proceed if approved by a majority vote in each participating community, the 2011 legislation allowed mergers to proceed even when a community voted 'no.'

The authors found that while there was some interest in mergers, most people were "on the fence" or opposed to the idea. One supervisory union was prepared to accept a merger but was deterred by the prospect of combining four separate school boards. Others were worried about the potential loss of local control and the weak evidence that mergers would actually save money. In the end, only one group of four towns elected to form a new regional education district under Act 153. Participants in the process were unanimous in describing the process as lengthy, complex, and interpersonally challenging.

The authors conclude that the initiative is unlikely to encourage voluntary school district mergers as the legislature intended. They propose that this was in part because state and local education officials failed to effectively communicate the benefits of the proposed mergers.

College Enrollment and Persistence in Rural Pennsylvania Schools

Caitlin Howley, Jerry Johnson, Aikaterini Passa, Kazuaki Uekawa
REL Mid-Atlantic, October 2014

[Article](#)

In this REL study, researchers analyzed average rates of college enrollment and first- and second-year persistence among rural and nonrural public high school students in Pennsylvania in 2009-10 and 2010-11. They looked at the association of student, school, and college-level factors with enrollment and persistence outcomes. Rural high schools had higher average college enrollment and persistence rates than city high schools but lower rates than suburban and town schools. High schools in rural-fringe communities had higher rates of enrollment and persistence than schools located in rural-distant or rural-remote communities.

At a district level, rural districts in the top quartile of school-level college enrollment rates had smaller proportions of rural schools and the rural schools they included were closer to urban areas. These districts had lower poverty rates, smaller percentages of students in special education and slightly more racial and ethnic diversity. Overall, these highest performing rural districts resembled suburban districts more than other rural districts.

The Value of People, Place, and Possibilities: A Multiple Case Study of High School Completion

Kristen Campbell Wilcox, Janet I. Angelis, Linda Baker, Hal A. Lawson
Journal of Research in Rural Education, October 2014

[Article](#)

This article examines classroom, school, and district processes and practices in rural high schools with higher-than-average graduation rates and compares them to those same processes and practices in rural high schools with average graduation rates. The researchers found that the rural schools in their sample with higher-than-average graduation rates shared several traits: 1) quality of academic goals, expectations, and learning opportunities; 2) nature of individual and collective educator efficacy; 3) the strategies educators used to develop and maintain family relationships and engage community members; and 4) mechanisms for adapting instruction and employing interventions for students at risk of dropping out.

In both types of rural districts, student performance and learning opportunities were tied to educator beliefs – including those regarding expectations for students – and these were in turn reflected in school and district processes. For example:

- In high-performing rural districts, teachers maintained high expectations for all students and “were always thinking long-term” whereas in districts with lower graduation rates, teachers had lower expectations for students.
- In high-performing rural districts, teachers and administrators ensured that students not only had access to college level courses but that students enrolled in these classes; they saw that it helped students see that they could perform at this level and put them on the path to college enrollment.
- Teachers in high-performing schools also engaged in collaborations with other schools and sought outside resources as well as opportunities to share knowledge. In lower-

performing districts, staff indicated that this type of collaboration was not possible due to budget cuts and reductions to the teaching workforce.

Overall, there was a greater sense of “academic optimism” in high-performing rural schools. While teachers were aware of the challenges that their schools and students faced, they avoided associating their students’ outside life (work, farm chores) with disinterest in academics as was sometimes seen in the low-performing schools.

The researchers’ findings suggest that high-performing rural schools are associated with a culture of high expectations and that teachers within these schools implement practices aligned with those expectations. The study also found that the high-performing schools in the study faced many of the same challenges as other rural schools, such as a declining tax base, increasing student mobility, and rising poverty rates.