



DEVELOPMENTS IN RURAL EDUCATION POLICY & RESEARCH

December 2014

Funding Opportunities for Rural Education

U.S. Department of Justice: Coordinated Tribal Assistance Solicitation Fiscal Year 2015

The U.S. Department of Justice has opened applications for its Fiscal Year 2015 competitive grantmaking process for tribal assistance. This program is focused on improving public safety and victim services. Funding from these grants may be used to support education/GED assistance or for educational and vocational programs intended to reduce recidivism among offenders.

All applications must be submitted through the U.S. Department of Justice's online [Grants Management System](#)

Applications are due by 9:00 pm E.T. on Tuesday, February 24, 2015. More information on the program can be found [here](#).

Operation AmeriCorps

Operation AmeriCorps is a grant competition open exclusively to tribal and local governments, including cities, towns, school districts, and state community service commissions. The program asks leaders to identify local challenges that AmeriCorps members (AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps NCCC, or AmeriCorps VISTA) can address in a period of no more than two years. All proposals must be place-based, include coordination with existing local organizations, and focus on transformational outcomes.

The Operation AmeriCorps Program has two funding priorities in Fiscal Year 2015: pressing community challenges and improving specific postsecondary outcomes.

Applicants in Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Delaware, Guam, Idaho, Missouri, North Carolina, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Washington must submit their proposals to the Corporation for National and Community Service before the deadline of January 15, 2013. Applicants in all other states should contact their state service commission for information on program deadlines.

A notice of intent to apply is due on December 29, 2014. More information on the program can be found [here](#).

America's Farmers Grow Rural Education

Farmer nominations will be accepted for the America's Farmers Grow Rural Education grant program beginning in January 2015. Information on the program, which has invested more than \$7 million in rural schools since 2011, is available [here](#).

Research, Commentary, or Other Developments in Rural Education

Online and Distance Learning in Southwest Tennessee: Implementation and Challenges

Laura Holian, Martha Alberg, Jack Daniel Strahl, John Burgette, and Eric Cramer
REL Appalachia, November 2014

[Article](#)

This report examines the findings from a questionnaire administered to members of the Southwest Tennessee Rural Education Cooperative (SWTREC) on their online and distance education course offerings and the challenges they have faced in implementing these programs. The members of SWTREC meet regularly to discuss these issues and collaborate on initiatives related to college and career readiness (many of which involve online and distance education). A major area of concern among members has been accessing courses that will prepare students for the workforce and post-secondary education as these opportunities are not available other than through online/distance learning courses.

Eighty percent of the member high schools that responded to the survey reported using online/distance education courses in the 2012-13 school year. These schools reported that they offered these courses primarily to increase the number of dual enrollment options available to students and to provide students with opportunities to increase credit accumulation. Online courses help address problems related to the dearth of college preparatory options in rural areas, including small student enrollment and problems recruiting and retaining teachers.

Interestingly, researchers found that schools offering online courses rated cost as the greatest barrier to implementation, while those that did not offer online courses rated technology as the greatest barrier to implementation. The majority of online classes offered were social studies or technical education courses, while the majority of distance education classes were English courses.

Rural Family-School Partnerships: Bridging Research and Practice

Gina M. Kunz, Susan M. Sheridan, Amanda Witte, Shannon Holmes, and Kristen Derr

National Center for Research in Rural Education

Presented at the CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood

April 10, 2014

[Presentation](#)

This presentation looks at the benefits of family-school partnerships for rural students. The researchers found that rural family-school partnerships – close collaboration between parents and schools that have clearly-specified rights and responsibilities – were highly correlated with many positive outcomes for students, families, and teachers, including:

- Improved student academic skills and performance
- Improved social skills and decreased disruptive behaviors
- Long-term academic success leading to school completion
- Improved instructional skills for teachers
- Greater parental knowledge of school functioning

However, the researchers also found that there are numerous factors that can interfere with school-family partnerships in rural communities. These factors include greater physical distances between the home and the school as well as limited interactions between families, teachers, and other school staff.

In order to better understand the utility of family-school partnerships, the researchers looked at the effects of a type of school-based meeting known as conjoint behavior consultations in rural communities. These parent-teacher meetings are used to help students who need additional behavioral and socio-emotional support. The researchers' preliminary findings suggest that the consultations increased feelings of trust between parents and schools. Further, the meetings reduced negative attitudes among parents, which may have resulted from more frequent contact, constructive problem solving, and home-school communications.

State of the Science of Teacher Professional Development in Rural Settings: A Comprehensive Review of the Literature

Gina Kunz, Lynne Clure, Maureen O'Connor, and Gwen Nugent

National Center for Research in Rural Education

Presented at the 106th National Rural Education Association Convention

October 2014

[Presentation](#)

This literature review focuses on rural-specific or rural-nonrural comparisons of teacher professional development programs in North America. Programs targeting school administration, university faculty, student teachers, those with targeted roles within the school (reading intervention specialists), and those that did not separate rural/nonrural teachers within the analysis were excluded from the review. Out of a total of 245 articles initially compiled by the authors, 66 met the final criteria for inclusion. Seventy-four percent of these studies used empirical research methods, though only five used a quasi-experimental design and just four used experimental design.

The authors found that the most common population targeted by professional development programs, according to the rural literature, were elementary school teachers (46/66). Only 11 percent of the studies looked at professional development programs for those that teach exclusively at the middle or high school level. Half of the studies addressed the use of distance learning in professional development. Interestingly, only five percent of the papers included in the literature review included a definition of "rural," and none of the definitions were identical, with each varying widely in terms of specificity.

Though the published literature on rural teachers' professional development is small, the authors found that the number of papers published on this topic has increased in the last decade. Further, they found that the trend in the types of research designs being used in these papers is shifting toward experimental and quasi-experimental design, indicating a wider breadth of research designs being used to examine these programs. The authors were not surprised by the large number of papers that discussed the use of technology, given what they saw as the realities of teacher professional development delivery methods in rural areas.

Finally, the authors have two recommendations for future research. First, they believe that future work in this area should expand to include more work on professional development programs among rural middle and high school teachers. Second, they recommend that future papers in this area include definitions of "rural," as it is important to ensure that this work contributes to rural education literature, not just wider writings on education.

Kindergarten Children's Development in Rural and Non-Rural Settings

Susan M. Sheridan, Michael J. Coutts, Shannon R. Holmes, Amanda L. Witte, and Sonia A. Bhatia

National Center for Research in Rural Education

Presented at the 2014 CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood

April 2014

[Presentation](#)

This presentation focuses on behavioral development in rural and nonrural children and the problems that may arise as these children make the transition to kindergarten. The researchers address behavioral problems that pose school readiness challenges for teachers in the context of children's home environments and relationships at home and school. They argue that rural and nonrural communities may differ in ways that may affect children's development and ability to cope with transitions such as the move to kindergarten, including: resource accessibility; economic characteristics; and the collective human, social, and cultural capital. Risk factors such as these may present a cumulative risk, making some children more susceptible to behavioral problems.

The researchers developed their study in order to understand the effects of community settings on parent and teacher reports of student behavior as well as to examine cumulative risk on children's behavior across rural and nonrural communities. Participants in the study (students, teachers, and parents) were drawn from two randomized control trials of kindergarten children in rural and nonrural communities identified as having disruptive behaviors. While the rural students were overwhelmingly male (84 percent), all of the nonrural students included in the sample were male, and over half of the latter group had an identified disability compared to just over a quarter of the rural students. The nonrural teachers had 7.6 years average teaching experience while the rural teachers had nearly twice that, with an average 14.1 years teaching experience.

Though there were marginal differences between the rural and nonrural students, teachers reported that rural students had "more challenging" behaviors than nonrural students. Conversely, parents reported that children in rural communities had fewer internalizing difficulties than nonrural students.

Based on interaction effects, the researchers believe that geographic settings – rural versus nonrural – matter significantly. They therefore believe that earlier interventions focused on decreasing problem behaviors and increasing adaptive behaviors – that are culturally sensitive or tailored to the community context in which children live – are needed to help ease these transitions. The researchers also acknowledge that there were limitations to their study, including a non-representative sample of rural areas (with their sample concentrated in the Midwest/Great Plains).

Technology-Delivered Instructional Coaching

Gwen Nugent, James Houston, Melissa Hall, and Gina Kunz

National Center for Research on Rural Education

Presented at the World Conference on E-Learning

October 2014

[Presentation](#)

This presentation examined the National Center for Research on Rural Education's implementation of a "tech-delivered" professional development program and the broader role of this type of delivery system for professional development within the rural education landscape. The researchers believe that "tech-delivered" professional development is promising for rural teachers as it can easily connect them with instructional coaches and provide much-needed workshop follow-up support that is linked with the actual goings-on of the rural classroom. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the professional development program on teacher and student outcomes.

Technology was used in this program for multiple purposes: to record classroom lessons, to deliver video files to coaches, and to connect teachers and coaches for synchronous coaching sessions. Teachers and coaches typically met twice a week for about 45 minutes during the six to eight week program period. At the end of the program, coaches had between six and eight thousand hours of classroom video to code using three instruments. In addition, all coaching sessions were recorded in order to assess adherence to the program's coaching protocols.

The researchers found numerous advantages in the use of technology for rural professional development. Video coaching eliminated the need for coaches to travel to schools, creating large savings and allowing for greater flexibility – an "anywhere, anytime" advantage for both coaches and teachers. The physical separation of the coaches also helped distance them from the school administration and establish trust with teachers. Video recordings allowed teachers to review their lessons and develop a teaching portfolio. Videos were also helpful for coders who could start, stop, and rewind the recordings as they coded.

The researchers also found that there were some drawbacks to the technology-driven program. Many teachers were unfamiliar with videoconferencing and other aspects of program technology and needed hands-on practice before they could begin to benefit from the project. The video files could also be slow to transfer because of their size and required significant storage capacity. Coding the videos was also a difficult, time-consuming process and required as many as three viewings because of the three coding instruments. Finally, getting institutional review board (IRB) approval to film in classrooms was difficult for the researchers.

Though there were drawbacks to the program, participating teachers gave it overwhelmingly positive feedback, with the overall coaching rating approximately 4.75 on a 5-point scale. This (along with other survey responses) indicated to the researchers that technology can provide high-quality professional development for rural teachers and that video can help encourage self-reflection and changes in instructional practice. Initial results also showed that it can help provide more flexibility for teachers and cut costs for rural schools.