

## AGENDA & PROGRAM

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PRESENTED BY THE  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON RURAL EDUCATION (R<sup>2</sup>ED)

# Welcome

Dear Colleagues,

The National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed) cordially welcomes you to **Connect-Inform-Advance**, the 2013 National Conference on Rural Education Research. This conference will serve as a platform for exploring the critical role of research in *promoting the academic success of rural students*, an endeavor that will continue to require the concerted efforts of researchers, practitioners and policymakers from across the United States. Thankfully, many individuals from these related sectors have converged in Omaha this week to contribute their considerable experience and expertise to this important work.

Though rural communities share much with their suburban and urban counterparts, they also present unique opportunities and challenges when it comes to providing education of the very highest quality. The prior and ongoing efforts of countless dedicated individuals have allowed us to make much progress toward grasping these opportunities and confronting these challenges. However, the complexity of the issues at hand – and the ever-evolving nature of rural America – demands that we continue pursuing relevant research that will uncover new and better ways to serve its students.

**Connect-Inform-Advance** will specifically explore research findings on the interrelated influences and impacts of teaching, family engagement, school environment and contextual factors on rural student performance. The name of our conference speaks directly to our strategies for accomplishing this: *connecting* leaders and innovators from across the rural education spectrum; *informing* our own and others’ perspectives by engaging in research-based dialogue throughout our two days together; and *advancing* our collective understanding of how research, practice and policy can combine to best support rural education.

We thank you for participating in **Connect-Inform-Advance** and greatly appreciate your commitment to the 20% of students attending schools in rural communities. With your help, the discussions, ideas and plans born of this collaboration will shape and define a research agenda essential to improving educational quality and outcomes for these students.

Susan M. Sheridan, PhD



George Holmes University Professor of Educational Psychology  
Director, National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)  
Director, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools (CYFS)  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln



Conference Agenda	03
Introductory Speakers	05
Featured Speakers	06
Session One: <i>Teacher Influences on Rural Student Academic Success</i>	07
Session One Breakout Roundtable Discussion	08
Session Two: <i>Community &amp; Family Influences on Rural Student Academic Success</i>	09
Session Two Breakout Roundtable Discussion	10
Day One Panel Discussion & Session Reflections	11
Exhibits & Poster Presentations	12
Teacher Panel	13
Session Three: <i>School &amp; Contextual Influences on Rural Student Academic Success</i>	15
Session Three Breakout Roundtable Discussion	16
Day Two Panel Discussion & Session Reflections	17
Presenter, Panelist & Moderator Biographies	18

CONFERENCE AGENDA

CONNECT–INFORM–ADVANCE 2013 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RURAL EDUCATION RESEARCH



Day One: Wednesday, April 3, 2013

8:00 AM	REGISTRATION AT THE WELCOME DESK
8:30 AM	PLATTE/ELKHORN

Welcome & Opening Comments

**Susan Sheridan**, Director, National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed) & Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools (CYFS)

**Prem Paul**, Vice Chancellor for Research & Economic Development, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL)

9:00 AM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Keynote Address: *Rural Education for the 21st Century*

**Roger Breed**, Commissioner, Nebraska Department of Education

9:20 AM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Session 1: Teacher Influences on Rural Student Academic Success

*The Influence of Rural Professional Development Characteristics on Teacher-Perceived Knowledge & Practice*

**Todd Glover**, Director of the Research Operations Core, R²Ed; **Gwen Nugent**, Director of the Leadership Institute Core, R²Ed

*Including Rural Schools in Randomized Controlled Trials*

**Elizabeth Autio**, Senior Associate, Education Northwest

*Project READERS: An Evaluation of Rural Professional Development with Distance Coaching in Response to Intervention & Early Reading Supports*

**Todd Glover**, Director of the Research Operations Core, R²Ed; **Tanya Ihlo**, Research Assistant Professor, CYFS

10:45 AM	BREAK
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11:00 AM	PLATTE, ELKHORN, COUNCIL BLUFFS A, COUNCIL BLUFFS B
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Breakout Roundtable Discussions

12:00 PM	WORKING LUNCH IN THE ATRIUM
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1:15 PM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Special Address: *Strengthen & Elevate the Teaching Profession: Implications for Rural Education*

**John White**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Rural Outreach, U.S. Department of Education

1:45 PM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Session 2: Community & Family Influences on Rural Student Academic Success

*Rurality & Reading Readiness: The Mediating Role of Parent Engagement*

**Brandy Clarke**, Research Assistant Professor, CYFS

*Improving Educational Outcomes for American Indian Children: Community & Family Influences on Rural Student Academic Success*

**Marsha Gebhardt**, BabyFACE Project Director, Parents as Teachers

*Rural Parents & Teachers as Partners: Preliminary Results of a Randomized Trial*

**Susan Sheridan**, Director, R²Ed & CYFS; **Gina Kunz**, Director of Rural Outreach & Coordination, R²Ed

3:00 PM	BREAK
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3:15 PM	PLATTE, ELKHORN, COUNCIL BLUFFS A, COUNCIL BLUFFS B
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Breakout Roundtable Discussions

4:15 PM	BREAK
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4:30 PM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Day 1 Panel Discussion & Session Reflections

**Robert Mahaffey**, President, Organizations Concerned about Rural Education

**Brent McBride**, Professor of Human Development & Director of Child Development Laboratory, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**Jennifer Widner**, Principal, O’Neill Elementary School

**Matt Blomstedt**, Executive Director, Nebraska ESU Coordinating Council

**Moderator: Andrea Beesley**, Senior Director, Mid-Continent Research for Education & Learning (McREL)

5:30 PM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Transition & Comments from Susan Sheridan

5:45 PM	EXHIBITS, POSTER PRESENTATIONS & NETWORKING RECEPTION IN THE BIG BLUE & FOUNTAIN COURTYARD
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Day Two: Thursday, April 4, 2013

8:30 AM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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**Teacher Panel:** *The Impact of Evidence-Based Professional Development on Rural Teacher Instructional Practice & Student Support*

**Moderators: Amanda Witte**, Project Manager for Conjoint Behavioral Consultation in Rural Communities, CYFS

**Jim Houston**, Project Manager for CSI: Coaching Science Inquiry in Rural Schools, R²Ed

**Michelle Howell Smith**, Project Manager for the Evaluation of the Efficacy of Rural Professional Development with Distance Coaching on RTI-Based Instructional Differentiation (Project READERS), R²Ed

9:30 AM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Introductory Comments

**Marjorie Kostelnik**, Dean, College of Education & Human Sciences, UNL

9:45 AM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Session 3: School & Contextual Influences on Rural Student Academic Success

*Accelerating the Mathematical Development of Young Navajo Children*

**Mark Sorensen**, President/Director, STAR School

*Rural Demographics & the Standards & Indicators for School Improvement: Influence on Elementary School Accountability in Kentucky*

**Douglas Smith**, Professor & Department Head of Sociology, Western Kentucky University (WKU);

**Stephen Miller**, Associate Professor of Educational Administration, Leadership & Research, WKU

*The Future of Rural School Research & Development: Methodological Innovations*

**James Bovaird**, Director, Statistics & Methodology Core, R²Ed; Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, UNL

11:00 AM	BREAK
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11:15 AM	PLATTE, ELKHORN, COUNCIL BLUFFS A, COUNCIL BLUFFS B
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Breakout Roundtable Discussions

12:15 PM	WORKING LUNCH IN THE ATRIUM
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1:30 PM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Day 2 Panel Discussion & Session Reflections

**Robert Mahaffey**, President, Organizations Concerned about Rural Education

**Rick Edwards**, Director, Center for Great Plains Studies; Professor, Department of Economics, College of Business Administration, UNL

**Dean Tickle**, Superintendent, Elm Creek Public School District

**Andrea Beesley**, Senior Director, McREL

**Moderator: Ronnie Green**, Vice President, Agriculture & Natural Resources, UNL; Harlan Vice Chancellor, Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources, UNL

2:30 PM	PLATTE/ELKHORN
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Endnote Address

**Cindy McIntee**, Past President, National Rural Education Association; Education Director, McIntee & Associates; Program Manager, Office of School Transformation, South Carolina Department of Education

3:15 PM	CLOSING COMMENTS FROM SUSAN SHERIDAN IN PLATTE/ELKHORN
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# INTRODUCTORY SPEAKERS

Welcome & Opening Comments

## Susan Sheridan, PhD ▶ Wednesday, April 3 / 8:30 AM

Dr. Susan Sheridan directs the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed) and the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. As a George Holmes University Professor of educational psychology at UNL, she has conducted research on family-school partnerships and early intervention, including those occurring in rural contexts, for more than 20 years.

Sheridan has published more than 200 books, chapters and journal articles, having authored papers that were recognized as the year’s best by School Psychology Review and Journal of School Psychology. She has earned more than \$32 million in federal, state and foundation grants, most notably for randomized trials of family-school partnership interventions and related studies. Sheridan previously served as president of the Society for the Study of School Psychology and editor of School Psychology Review. She holds a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## Prem Paul, PhD, DVM ▶ Wednesday, April 3 / 8:45 AM

Dr. Prem Paul serves as vice chancellor for research and economic development at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Under his leadership, UNL has established the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed) and numerous other federally funded, multidisciplinary research centers.

Paul is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and an executive board member of the Council on Research Policy and Graduate Education at the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. He previously served on review panels for the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Science Foundation. In addition to publishing more than 100 refereed journal articles, books and book chapters, he holds more than 15 U.S. and international patents. Paul received a doctorate in veterinary microbiology from the University of Minnesota and a doctorate of veterinary medicine from Punjab Agricultural University.

## Marjorie Kostelnik, EdD ▶ Thursday, April 4 / 9:30 AM

Dr. Marjorie Kostelnik has served as dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln since 2000. An early childhood educator by training, Kostelnik’s scholarship and teaching focus on child socialization and developmentally appropriate practices for young children. She was on faculty at Michigan State University for 22 years prior to joining UNL, serving first as program supervisor of the Child Development Laboratories and then as chair of the Department of Family and Child Ecology.

Kostelnik previously served as vice president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, treasurer of the Board on Human Sciences at the Association of Public Land-grant Universities, and chair for the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance. She holds a doctorate in human development and family studies from The Pennsylvania State University.

# FEATURED SPEAKERS

Keynote, Special & Endnote Addresses

## Roger Breed, EdD ▶ Wednesday, April 3 / 9:00 AM

Dr. Roger Breed has served as Nebraska’s Commissioner of Education since 2009, a role for which he was named National Educational Administrator of the Year in 2012. Prior to joining the Nebraska Department of Education, Breed was an educator and administrator in Nebraska’s rural and suburban school districts for nearly 40 years, earning recognition as the state’s Superintendent of the Year in 2007.

Breed has provided statewide leadership as an active participant on numerous committees and boards in the areas of state standards, assessment programs, personnel selection and certification, and other significant school policy issues. He has served on the Nebraska State Accreditation Committee, the executive board of the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, and the Greater Nebraska Schools Association. Breed holds a doctorate of education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

## John White ▶ Wednesday, April 3 / 1:15 PM

John White serves as deputy assistant secretary for rural outreach with the U.S. Department of Education, a position he has held since 2009. In that role, he oversees daily communication and outreach to rural schools, colleges, other stakeholders and the media on issues related to education in rural areas. White also represents the secretary of education on the White House Rural Council and is the secretary’s designee to the Interagency Coordinating Council for the Appalachian Regional Development Initiative.

White previously handled communications for a public school district, served as press secretary for Maryland’s secretary of state, and worked as a newspaper reporter for six years. He holds an MBA from the University of Maryland University College and a bachelor’s in English from the University of Maryland.

## Cindy McIntee, JD ▶ Thursday, April 4 / 2:30 PM

Cindy McIntee works as a consultant with McIntee and Associates, a consulting firm based in South Carolina. She also serves as a program manager for the Office of School Transformation at the South Carolina Department of Education. McIntee previously served as a policy coordinator and liaison to South Carolina for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s SERVE Center, where she oversaw the center’s technical assistance and research in the state. She is past president of the National Rural Education Association and the South Carolina Association for Rural Education.

McIntee has contributed to various publications centered on rural education. She also has special interests in the challenges facing chronically low-performing schools, along with dropout prevention and college readiness among African-Americans, migrant students and English-language learners. She holds a Juris Doctor and a bachelor’s in history from the University of South Carolina.



# SESSION ONE

Teacher Influences on Rural Student Academic Success ▶ Wednesday, April 3 / 9:20 AM

▶ **The Influence of Rural Professional Development Characteristics on Teacher-Perceived Knowledge & Practice**

Todd Glover, PhD / Gwen Nugent, PhD  
National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)

The Teachers Speak project is a large-scale, nationally representative survey of nearly 600 K-5 teachers from 43 states. The study examined variations in existing rural professional development experiences; potential influences of PD characteristics on teacher knowledge, perceptions and practices; and moderating effects of context and teacher variables.

After reviewing the study’s implementation, Drs. Todd Glover and Gwen Nugent will discuss its primary findings. The researchers will pinpoint what the survey revealed about the differences and similarities in professional development opportunities within rural vs. non-rural settings. They will also describe professional development characteristics – such as format, duration and subject matter – that correlated with rural teachers’ knowledge, perceptions and classroom practices.

▶ **Including Rural Schools in Randomized Controlled Trials**

Elizabeth Autio / Jason Greenberg-Motamedi, PhD  
Education Northwest

Nearly one-third of all U.S. schools reside in rural areas, sharing unique characteristics that affect implementation. These include multi-grade classrooms, small class sizes, and geographic isolation, to name a few. However, rural schools remain underrepresented in education research, particularly in rigorous studies.

This presentation will examine the recruitment of rural schools for education research and describe the development of an approach that was used to recruit Idaho schools for a randomized controlled trial. Autio will specifically explain how she and her colleagues created this recruitment approach according to input from multiple sources and a literature review. She will also illustrate how the approach’s focus on understanding local context, establishing personal connections, and offering high-quality professional development allowed her team to recruit a sample of schools that proved sufficient to power its study and reflected the proportion of rural schools in the state. Autio will conclude by discussing the importance of featuring rural school perspectives in future education research.

▶ **Project READERS: An Evaluation of Rural Professional Development with Distance Coaching in Response to Intervention & Early Reading Supports**

Todd Glover, PhD / Tanya Ihlo, PhD  
National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)

This presentation will describe Project READERS (Response to Effective Assessment-Driven Early Reading Support), an ongoing multi-cohort randomized trial that is examining how professional development with Web-based coaching may assist rural K-3 teachers in using student data to implement and adapt reading interventions.

In addition to outlining the study’s participants, procedures and measures, Drs. Todd Glover and Tanya Ihlo will review preliminary results and discuss implications for meeting needs and overcoming constraints facing teachers in rural communities. The researchers will also discuss opportunities and challenges presented during the study’s recruitment and implementation, along with future research directions suggested by Project READERS’ early findings.

## Session One Breakout Roundtable Discussion ▶ Wednesday, April 3 / 11:00 AM



### Framing Questions ▼

- a. What have we learned from research that can inform practice and policy related to teacher influences on rural student achievement?
- b. What can we learn from future research that can inform practice and policy related to teacher influences on rural student achievement?
- c. What are the challenges associated with conducting research related to teacher influences on rural student achievement? How can we meet these challenges?
- d. What is needed to move this rural education research agenda forward?

### Session-Specific ▼

- 1. How can schools, districts, states and universities use research to inform professional development opportunities for rural teachers?
- 2. How can practitioners’ experiences with current professional development practices, including coaching, inform future rural education research?
- 3. Based on the research and your experiences, what are your perceptions of the role of distance technology research in influencing rural education practice and policy?
- 4. What are the next immediate steps for rural education research, practice and policy related to teacher influences on rural students’ success?

### General ▼

- 1. What ongoing supports among research, practice and policy are necessary to make this a meaningful and progressive process that leads to improved outcomes for rural students? For example, how do we maintain collaborative partnerships so that the dialogue leads to meaningful research and application?
- 2. Thinking ahead to the translation of research to the classroom, what should we bear in mind when conducting research that we hope will lead to acceptable and meaningful outcomes for rural students?
- 3. How can researchers, practitioners and policymakers best incorporate feedback from teachers, parents and caregivers regarding intervention acceptability and utility?

# SESSION TWO

Community & Family Influences on Rural Student Academic Success ▶ Wednesday, April 3 / 1:45 PM

▶ **Rurality & Reading Readiness: The Mediating Role of Parent Engagement**

**Brandy Clarke, PhD**  
*Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools (CYFS)*

Research has demonstrated that reading skills greatly shape children’s academic success, and that the effects of poor reading are compounded over time. The literature has also shown that early family engagement in language and literacy activities plays an important role in young children’s reading development. However, relatively little is known about how living in rural communities influences literacy.

Dr. Brandy Clarke will present a study that examined the effect of setting on parents’ literacy engagement and children’s early literacy – and whether parental engagement mediates the relationship between setting and literacy. With regard to setting, Clarke specifically accounted for household ZIP codes, home literacy materials, children’s access to the library, and parents’ language and literacy behaviors. The presentation will outline results from families living in rural areas, towns, suburbs and urban areas.

▶ **Improving Educational Outcomes for American Indian Children: Community & Family Influences on Rural Student Academic Success**

**Marsha Gebhardt / Judy Pfannenstiel**  
*Parents as Teachers*

This presentation will address Parents as Teachers’ research into the Family and Child Education (FACE) and BabyFACE programs. Marsha Gebhardt will discuss an ongoing evaluation of the programs, specifically focusing on implementation fidelity and the research methods used to identify, define and measure effects of community and family influences on American Indian children’s school readiness.

The presentation will also examine the challenges and solutions associated with this research, exploring issues that range from tribal sovereignty and the availability of qualified staff to the identification, recruitment and retention of participants. Gebhardt will conclude by considering Parents as Teachers’ next steps for advancing this line of research.

▶ **Rural Parents & Teachers as Partners: Preliminary Results of a Randomized Trial**

**Susan Sheridan, PhD / Gina Kunz, PhD / Amanda Witte / Shannon Holmes / Michael Coutts**  
*National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)*

Much research has established that families significantly influence students’ development, with parental engagement positively predicting academic and social-behavioral adjustment. The literature has also demonstrated that programs aimed at supporting students have greater impact when they intentionally forge meaningful partnerships with families. Rural schools are uniquely positioned to foster and benefit from family-school partnerships; however, limited resources, logistical barriers and lack of familiarity challenge the development of effective partnerships in rural settings. Moreover, research has largely failed to identify evidence-based means to engage families as partners in rural settings.

This presentation will examine Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC), a structured, indirect intervention that focuses both on promoting students’ social-behavior and academic success and strengthening family-school partnerships. Though research on CBC has documented its positive effects on students’ behavioral, academic and social-emotional functioning across home and school settings, Dr. Susan Sheridan and her colleagues have only recently begun to examine its utility and efficacy in rural settings. This presentation will review preliminary results from the first two years of a four-year randomized controlled trial designed to do exactly that.



## Session Two Breakout Roundtable Discussion ▶ Wednesday, April 3 / 3:15 PM

### Framing Questions ▼

- a. What have we learned from research that can inform practice and policy related to family and community influences on rural student achievement?
- b. What can we learn from future research that can inform practice and policy related to family and community influences on rural student achievement?
- c. What are the challenges associated with conducting research related to family and community influences on rural student achievement? How can we meet these challenges?
- d. What is needed to move this rural education research agenda forward?

### Session-Specific ▼

- 1. How can schools, districts, states and universities use research to inform family-school partnership approaches / programs implemented in rural communities?
- 2. How can families’ and practitioners’ experiences with family-school partnership approaches / programs inform future rural education research?
- 3. What are the next immediate steps for rural education research, practice and policy related to community and family influences on rural students’ success?

### General ▼

- 1. What ongoing supports among research, practice and policy are necessary to make this a meaningful and progressive process that leads to improved outcomes for rural students? For example, how do we maintain collaborative partnerships so that the dialogue leads to meaningful research and application?
- 2. Thinking ahead to translation of research to practice and policy, what should we bear in mind when conducting research that we hope will lead to acceptable and meaningful outcomes for rural students?
- 3. How can researchers, practitioners and policymakers best incorporate feedback from teachers, parents and caregivers regarding intervention acceptability and utility?

# DAY 1

## Panel Discussion & Session Reflections

Wednesday, April 3 / 4:30 PM

Featuring representatives from the research, practice and policy communities, this panel will offer its thoughts on the topics discussed and questions raised during Session 1 (Teacher Influences) and Session 2 (Community and Family Influences) of **Connect-Inform-Advance**.

Robert Mahaffey

President, Organizations Concerned about Rural Education; Director of Marketing & Communications, Rural School & Community Trust

Brent McBride

Professor of Human Development & Director of Child Development Laboratory, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Jennifer Widner

Principal, O'Neill Elementary School

Matt Blomstedt

Executive Director, Nebraska ESU Coordinating Council

Moderator: Andrea Beesley

Senior Director, Mid-Continent Research for Education & Learning (McREL)

## EXHIBITS & POSTER PRESENTATIONS

### DAY 1 POSTERS

**Cutrer, Elizabeth; Ricks, Denise; Vernon-Feagan, Lynne**

*Targeted Reading Intervention: Building Teacher Expertise in Rural Schools through Webcam Coaching*

**Fahsl, Allison; Bracey, Georgia; Mayer, Gary; Marlette, Stephen**

*Supporting the Integration of Engineering Design in K-12 Rural Schools*

**Hodsdon, Michelle; Murdock, Jennifer; Hess, Robyn**

*Tracing the Path of First-Generation Students from Rural Areas to University*

**Houston, Jim; Olson, Melissa; Coover, Peg; Kendall, Sandy; Hayden Jr., Bruce; Nugent, Gwen; Kunz, Gina; Pedersen, Jon**

*Impact of Guided Science Inquiry Professional Development on Rural Science Teachers*

**Light, Mark; Hedrick, Jason; Dick, Jeff**

*College Readiness for Rural Youth Initiative*

**Meyers, Barbara; Broekmann, Cheryl**

*Online Together: Bridging Distances*

**Middleton, Michael; Abrams, Eleanor; Dow, Judy; Thelemarck, Claes**

*Mapping Sustainable Practices: Contextualizing Science for Rural Adolescents Through Community-Based Programs*

**Todd-Meyer, Lois**

*A Holistic Approach to Reading Intervention for Older Adolescents*

### DAY 2 POSTERS

**Arrington, Jane**

*Culturally Responsive Reaching: Perceptions of Preservice Teachers in Appalachia*

**Chandler, Renee**

*Mismatch in Rural America: Middle Class Teachers, High-Poverty Schools*

**Clements, Peggy; Heppen, Jessica; Walters, Kirk**

*Increasing Rural Eighth Graders' Access to Algebra I Using Online Learning*

**Darling, Lynn**

*The Challenges of Access to High Quality Early Learning Experiences in Rural Communities*

**La Prad, Jim; La Prad, Tamara**

*The Coalition of Essential Schools & Rural Educational Reform*

**McCarty, Wendy L.**

*Alternative Teacher Certification: Preserving Nebraska's Rural Schools*

**Nantais, Melissa; Zielinski, Jerry**

*Supporting Rural Implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS): A Statewide Network*

**Nichols Jr., Joseph R.; Cuenca, Alexander**

*Rural Communities & Rural Youth's Learning About Politics*

**Smith, Elizabeth**

*Lessons from Lake View: Judicial Involvement in School Funding in Rural Arkansas*

**Teahon, Michael D.; Isom, Jamie**

*Nebraska Educators' Perceptions on the Implementation of a Balanced Assessment System*

### EXHIBITORS

Florida Center for Reading Research

Grand Canyon University

McGraw-Hill Education

Nebraska CLC Network

UNL Independent Study High School





# TEACHER PANEL

Thursday, April 4 / 8:30 AM

**The Impact of Evidence-Based Professional Development on Rural Teacher Instructional Practice & Student Support**

## Teachers

This panel will consist of teachers who have participated in ongoing projects conducted through the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed).

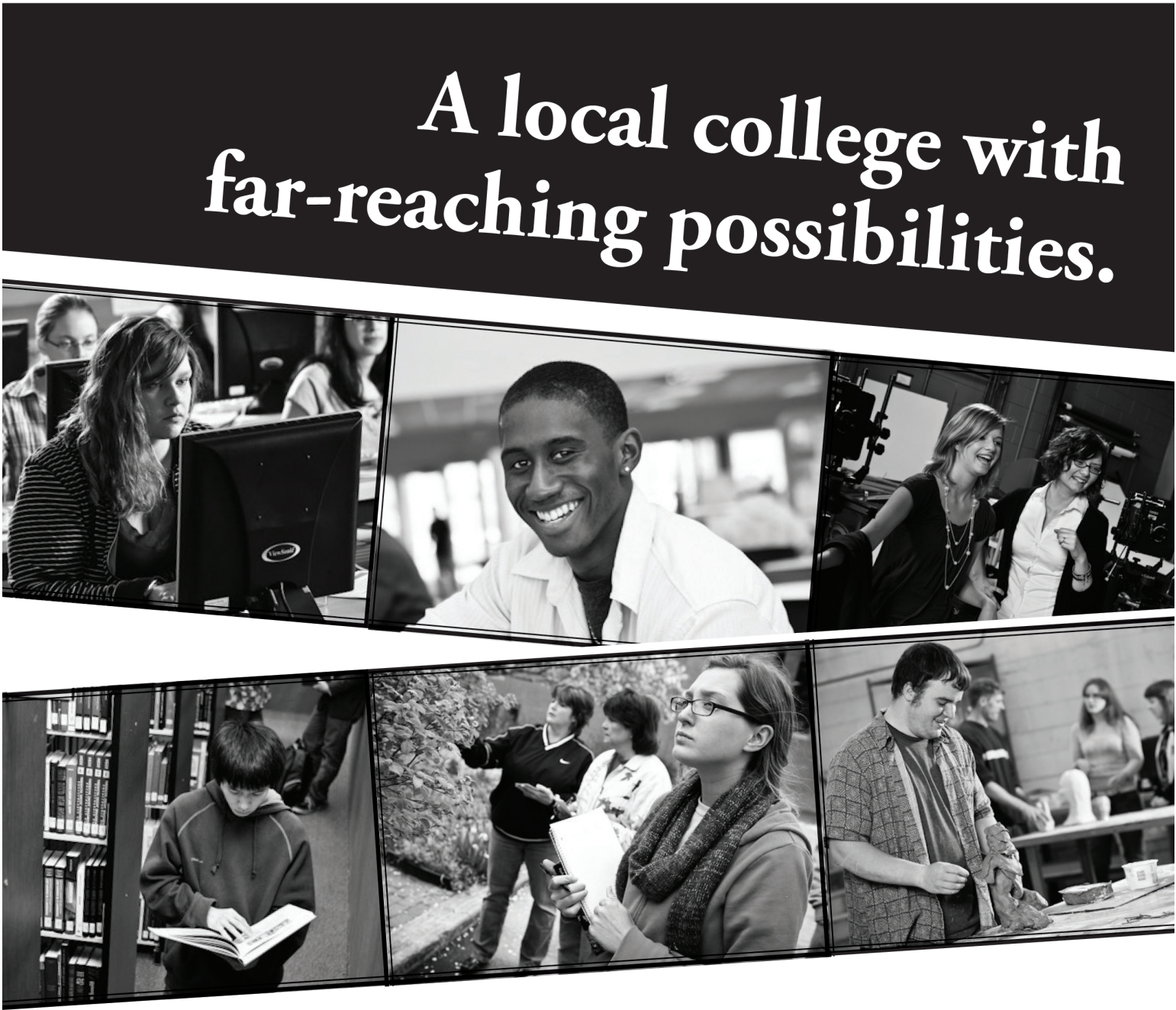
These educators will offer insights into their experiences with professional development initiatives aimed at enhancing family-school partnerships to improve student behavior; expanding instruction and learning of the scientific inquiry approach; and using student data to implement and adapt reading interventions.

## Moderators

- Amanda Witte**  
Project Manager for CBC in Rural Communities, R<sup>2</sup>Ed
- Jim Houston**  
Project Manager for CSI: Coaching Science Inquiry in Rural Schools, R<sup>2</sup>Ed
- Michelle Howell Smith**  
Project Manager for the Evaluation of the Efficacy of Rural Professional Development with Distance Coaching on RTI-Based Instructional Differentiation (Project READERS), R<sup>2</sup>Ed



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# SESSION THREE

School & Contextual Influences on Rural Student Academic Success ▶ Thursday, April 4 / 9:45 AM

▶ **Accelerating the Mathematical Development of Young Navajo Children**

**Mark Sorensen, EdD**  
*Service To All Relations (STAR) School*

In educating students who hail from the Navajo Nation, the Service To All Relations (STAR) School weaves Navajo cultural values into its daily approach. The STAR School has spent years researching the effects of this approach on the math skills of Navajo children from age 3 through third grade.

This presentation will examine the purposes, processes and results of the school’s research. STAR School director Dr. Mark Sorensen will discuss how the incorporation of Navajo values and adaptation of Montessori math materials have influenced the development of the school’s students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. He will also feature clips from training videos that highlight the school’s approach to indigenous education.

▶ **Rural Demographics & the Standards & Indicators for School Improvement: Influence on Elementary School Accountability in Kentucky**

**Douglas Clayton Smith, PhD / Stephen Miller, PhD**  
*Western Kentucky University*

This presentation will outline a study that investigated the influence of demographic factors; a new measure of rurality; and the importance of Kentucky’s Standards and Indicators for School Improvement (SISI) on the Academic Index, the primary achievement measure from Kentucky’s accountability assessment.

The study’s authors, Drs. Douglas Smith and Stephen Miller, will discuss their findings with respect to understanding (a) the interplay between rurality and other demographics, and (b) the potential of SISI standards for whole school reform as a tool for improving rural schools.

▶ **The Future of Rural School Research & Development: Methodological Innovations**

**James Bovaird, PhD**  
*National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)*

The unique contexts and features of rural education systems lead to the need for unique and innovative solutions. Dr. James Bovaird will discuss how rural education research has and will continue to overcome perceived limitations to true experimentation while still approximating the level of knowledge available through random assignment and explicit environmental control.

Bovaird will demonstrate how many viable solutions that exist in other disciplines can be translated to rural education research. He will specifically discuss the operational definition of “rural” and its impact on inferences; preserving and featuring the uniqueness of rural settings in systems-level investigations through advanced statistical modeling; quasi-experimentation as an alternative to traditional random assignment; efficiency of measurement paradigms to reduce the amount of data necessary for valid inferences; and innovations in small-sample inferential testing.

## Session Three Breakout Roundtable Discussion ▶ Thursday, April 4 / 11:15 AM



### Framing Questions ▼

- a. What have we learned from research that can inform practice and policy related to school and contextual influences on rural student achievement?
- b. What can we learn from future research that can inform practice and policy related to school and contextual influences on rural student achievement?
- c. What are the challenges associated with conducting research related to school and contextual influences on rural student achievement? How can we meet these challenges?
- d. What is needed to move this rural education research agenda forward?

### Session-Specific ▼

- 1. Based on the research and your experiences, what do you believe schools, districts, states and universities have begun to learn about school and contextual factors that influence student outcomes in rural communities?
- 2. How are changes in rural education environments – including demographics, school consolidation and the growth of charter schools – influencing rural education research?
- 3. What are the next immediate steps for rural education research, practice and policy related to school and contextual influences on rural students’ success?

### General ▼

- 1. How are the evolving definitions of “rurality” changing the ways that researchers, practitioners and policymakers approach the challenges of improving rural schools?
- 2. What ongoing supports among research, practice and policy are necessary to make this a meaningful and progressive process that leads to improved outcomes for rural students? For example, how do we maintain collaborative partnerships so that the dialogue leads to meaningful research and application?
- 3. Thinking ahead to translation of research to practice and policy, what should we bear in mind when conducting research that we hope will lead to acceptable and meaningful outcomes for rural students?

## DAY 2

### Panel Discussion & Session Reflections

Thursday, April 4 / 1:30 PM

**Featuring representatives from the research, practice and policy communities, this panel will offer its thoughts on the topics discussed and questions raised during Session 3 (School and Contextual Influences) of Connect-Inform-Advance.**

#### Robert Mahaffey

President, Organizations Concerned about Rural Education; Director of Marketing & Communications, Rural School & Community Trust

#### Rick Edwards

Director, Center for Great Plains Studies; Professor, Department of Economics, College of Business Administration, UNL

#### Dean Tickle

Superintendent, Elm Creek Public School District

#### Andrea Beesley

Senior Director, Mid-Continent Research for Education & Learning (McREL)

#### Moderator: Ronnie Green

Vice President, Agriculture & Natural Resources, UNL; Harlan Vice Chancellor, Institute of Agriculture & Natural Resources, UNL

## BIOS

### Presenter, Panelist & Moderator Biographies

#### Presenter Biographies

##### ► Elizabeth Autio

Elizabeth Autio serves as a senior associate in the Center for Research, Evaluation and Assessment at Education Northwest. She has extensive experience in education research and works on a number of projects that serve rural students throughout the Pacific Northwest region. With funding from the Institute of Education Sciences, Autio is currently coordinating an efficacy study of an instructional model for English-language learners in Idaho. Her prior work focused on evaluations of the Reading First program in six states, including rural areas of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Washington and Wyoming.

Autio has particular interest in the use of rigorous research to inform educator decision-making and convey findings to stakeholders in digestible, usable formats. She holds a master's in policy analysis from Columbia University.

##### ► James Bovaird, PhD

Dr. James Bovaird directs the Statistics and Methodology Core for the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed). He also serves as associate professor of educational psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and director of the Statistics and Research Methodology Unit at the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools.

Bovaird's research focuses on methodological applications and innovations in the use of advanced multivariate techniques for the social sciences, particularly the evaluation of intervention efficacy through an ecological perspective. In serving as the primary statistician for several currently funded and completed randomized controlled trials, Bovaird has received more than \$23 million in grant funding while collaborating with colleagues in the behavioral, social and education sciences.

##### ► Brandy Clarke, PhD

Dr. Brandy Clarke is a research assistant professor at the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools, which houses the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed). Her research interests include early education, development and intervention; home-school partnerships; and the Conjoint Behavioral Consultation model.

Through R<sup>2</sup>Ed, Clarke is investigating the effects of contextual variables on family involvement in children's education across both rural and urban settings. She previously directed the Pre-3T Project, a federally funded grant aimed at creating a language and literacy intervention for preschool children at risk of developing reading difficulties. Clarke holds a doctorate in school psychology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

##### ► Marsha Gebhardt

Marsha Gebhardt directs the Parents as Teachers national office in St. Louis, currently supervising the organization's five-year Investing in Innovations (i3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. In that role, she oversees the fidelity of implementing professional development and extensive technical assistance to 40 parent educators at 22 programs within Bureau of Indian Education schools.

Gebhardt previously spent 12 years directing Parents as Teachers' work in the Bureau of Indian Education's Family and Child Education (FACE) program. For 18 years, her work has focused on helping American Indian parent-educators provide excellent home-based services to families who live in extremely rural settings and have children prenatal through preschool. Gebhardt holds a master's of social work from the University of Missouri.



# PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES (CONTINUED)

► **Todd Glover, PhD**

Dr. Todd Glover directs the Research Operations Core at the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed) and serves as a research associate professor at the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools.

Glover has significant experience developing and evaluating academic and behavioral supports for K-6 students. He has also managed multiple large-scale, multi-site longitudinal research projects. Glover’s professional writing has primarily addressed the investigation of academic and behavioral interventions and professional development for teachers in rural schools. His prior experience as a teacher and numerous partnerships with school personnel have given him particular insights into the challenges involved in bridging research with practice.

► **Tanya Ihlo, PhD**

Dr. Tanya Ihlo is a research assistant professor at the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools. She also serves as lead project manager for the Nebraska Response-to-Intervention Consortium, working with the Nebraska Department of Education and Educational Service Units across the state.

Ihlo has extensive professional development experience as a Reading First director and an educational consultant for a regional education agency in Ohio. She also has a thorough understanding of a systems approach to both school reform and academic and behavioral student interventions. Ihlo holds a doctorate in school psychology from the University of Cincinnati.

► **Gina Kunz, PhD**

Dr. Gina Kunz directs the Rural Outreach and Coordination Unit of the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed), for which she also serves as a co-principal investigator. She is also an assistant director and research associate professor at the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools.

Since 1996, Kunz has served in numerous capacities on grants totaling nearly \$18 million, serving as co-PI for projects such as CSI: Coaching Science Inquiry in Rural Schools and Conjoint Behavior Consultation in Rural Communities. She has led numerous professional development workshops and training sessions for pre-service and active professionals in the areas of school psychology and education.

► **Stephen Miller, PhD**

Dr. Stephen Miller is an associate professor of educational administration, leadership and research at Western Kentucky University. Miller’s research spans school effectiveness, reform and accountability; the dynamics of change processes; and the continuing inequalities of class- and race-based achievement gaps. Prior to earning his doctorate from Michigan State University, Miller taught junior high science, served as an assistant middle school principal, and worked as a high school principal.

► **Gwen Nugent, PhD**

Dr. Gwen Nugent directs the Rural Education Leadership Institute Core at the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R<sup>2</sup>Ed) and serves as a research professor at the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools.

Nugent has more than 30 years’ experience in the design, production and evaluation of mediated instruction, serving as project manager for more than 300 multimedia projects aimed at a variety of subject areas and audiences. Nugent currently serves as principal investigator for R<sup>2</sup>Ed’s Coaching Science Inquiry in Rural Schools project, which is examining how professional development and follow-up coaching efforts influence teachers’ knowledge and implementation of guided scientific inquiry.

► **Douglas Smith, PhD**

Dr. Douglas Clayton Smith serves as department head and professor of sociology at Western Kentucky University. His research interests include community theory, rural isolation, the relationship of place and space, perceptions of alternative schooling, and regional social movements. Smith previously served as editor-in-chief of The Journal of Rural Social Sciences and assistant editor for Sociological Inquiry. He holds a doctorate in sociology from The Pennsylvania State University.

► **Mark Sorensen, EdD**

Dr. Mark Sorensen is the co-founder and director of the Service To All Relations (STAR) School, a K-8 charter school in rural northern Arizona that primarily serves students from the Navajo Nation. He also serves as founding executive director of the Native American Grant Schools Association, a collective of 30 community-controlled tribal and charter schools that assists Native American communities throughout the Southwest.

Since the passage of the Arizona charter school law in 1994, Sorensen has led efforts to help tribal communities gain control of their schools. He has spent more than 25 years working as a principal and superintendent of schools for students living on the Navajo Reservation.

## Panelist Biographies

► **Andrea Beesley, PhD (also a moderator)**

Dr. Andrea Beesley is a senior director at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, where she conducts randomized controlled trials and researches issues related to rural schools. Prior to joining McREL, Beesley spent two years as a teacher, four years as a designer of distance learning programs, and one year working with rural schools on authentic mathematics activities. She has published articles in the Journal of Research in Rural Education, The Rural Educator and numerous other peer-reviewed publications. Beesley holds a doctorate in instructional psychology and technology from the University of Oklahoma.

► **Matt Blomstedt**

Matt Blomstedt serves as executive director of the Nebraska Educational Service Unit Coordinating Council, which oversees each of the state’s 17 ESUs. He previously directed the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association and worked with the Nebraska Rural Development Commission. Blomstedt also held a post as a research analyst for the Education Committee of the Nebraska Legislature.

► **Rick Edwards, PhD**

Dr. Rick Edwards directs the Center for Great Plains Studies, a regional research and teaching program established at the University of Nebraska in 1976. Edwards also serves as professor of economics within the College of Business Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He previously held positions as UNL’s senior vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky. His research interests include the economics, history, demography and natural resources of the Great Plains region. He holds a doctorate from Harvard University.

► **Robert Mahaffey**

Robert Mahaffey serves as president of Organizations Concerned about Rural Education, a national coalition of education, school infrastructure, agriculture, community development, and technology and utility organizations dedicated to providing a quality education for all rural children and securing the economic future of rural America. He also serves as director of marketing and communications for the Rural School and Community Trust, a national nonprofit organization addressing the crucial relationship between good schools and thriving communities.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES (CONTINUED)

► Brent McBride, PhD

Dr. Brent McBride is a professor of human development and director of the Child Development Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include father involvement in child rearing, child care, parent education and parent involvement in school settings. McBride serves on the editorial boards for the journals Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Early Education and Development, and Early Childhood Research and Practice. He holds a doctorate in early childhood education from the University of Maryland.

► Dean Tickle

Dean Tickle serves as superintendent of the Elm Creek Public School District in rural south-central Nebraska. Prior to joining Elm Creek, he served as principal of Lexington Middle School for 11 years. Tickle also has experience as an assistant principal and English teacher.

► Jennifer Widner

Jennifer Widner is the principal at O’Neill Elementary School, which resides in rural northeast Nebraska and currently educates about 360 K-6 students. Before becoming a principal, Widner gained experience as a classroom teacher and library media specialist.

Moderator Biographies

► Ronnie Green, PhD

Dr. Ronnie Green is Harlan Vice Chancellor for the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a position that also serves as vice president of the University of Nebraska. He was formerly the national program leader in food animal production at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Research Service. He also served as a professor of animal science at Colorado State University and as an assistant professor at Texas Tech University. Green holds a doctorate in animal science from UNL.

► Jim Houston

Jim Houston serves as project manager for the Coaching Science Inquiry in Rural Schools study at the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed). He previously spent more than a decade in Nebraska’s public school system, serving as a teacher and dean of students at the middle and high school levels. He holds master’s and educational specialist degrees in educational administration from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

► Michelle Howell Smith, PhD

Dr. Michelle Howell Smith serves as project manager for Evaluation of the Efficacy of Rural Professional Development with Distance Coaching on RTI-Based Instructional Differentiation (Project READERS) at the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed). She holds a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

► Amanda Witte

Amanda Witte coordinates the Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) in Rural Communities project for the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed). She previously directed the CBC in the Early Grades project for the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools. Witte is a doctoral candidate in educational psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



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