Advancing Rural Education Research: Results from the R²Ed Conference

Gwen Nugent and Gina Kunz
Susan Sheridan, Mary Hellwege & Maureen O’Connor
CONNECT INFORM ADVANCE

2013 APRIL 3-4 OMAHA

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RURAL EDUCATION RESEARCH
Conference Goals

• Assemble education researchers, practitioners and policymakers from across the country
• Foster dialogue about research-supported influences of teaching, family engagement, community involvement, school environment and contextual factors on the academic success of rural students
• Provide a research platform for exploring current issues and future directions of rural schools and education policy
• Feature presentations, roundtable discussions, open panels and a conference-specific Twitter feed
Conference Attendees

- Practitioners: 32%
- Researchers: 50%
- Policymakers: 5%
- Other: 3%
- State Dept of Ed: 10%
Conference Format

• Researcher and panel presentations focusing on influences on rural student academic success
  – Teacher
  – Community and family
  – Contextual

• Conference attendees participated in small group discussions focused by guiding questions, e.g.
  – What have we learned from past research and what can we learn from future research regarding three key influences?
  – How do we meet the challenges associated with rural research?
  – What are immediate next steps for rural education research, practice and policy?

• Designated note takers at each table
Themes from Qualitative Analysis of Notes

• Defining and accounting for the rural context
• Influences on student outcomes
• Interdisciplinary research partnerships
• Future directions and research dissemination
Defining and Accounting for the Rural Context

• Lack of consistent definition of “rural”
  • Need for meaningful criteria
  • Need to identify contextual variables
  • Need to consider commonalities as well as differences
Influences on Student Outcomes

• Lack of unified definition of and methods for measuring student success
• Myriad influences on student success not traditionally considered in research
• Importance of teacher professional development
Interdisciplinary Research Partnerships

- Need for partnerships among LEAs, regional service units, state agencies, higher education, local school boards, families, communities, researchers, and policymakers
- Need for more “authentic” partnerships
- Need to develop ways to maintain communication
Future Directions

• Need to get research into hand of consumers
• Need for comprehensive research agenda with multiple rigorous methodologies
• Future topics
  • Community-related variables
  • Empowering families to be involved in research
  • Evaluating sustained impact of professional development
Contact Information

Gwen C. Nugent

gnugent@unlnotes.unl.edu

Gina M. Kunz

gkunz2@unl.edu

National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)
Website: http://r2ed.unl.edu