National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)

Susan M. Sheridan, PhD, Director
Co-Directors: Drs. Todd Glover, Gwen Nugent, Gina Kunz, Jim Bovaird
What is R²Ed About?

- **Children** growing up in rural America, going to rural schools, and developing skills and competencies in the basic areas of reading and science

- **Rural schools, teachers, and families**, and the kinds of supports that they need to help advance the learning of rural students

- *Increased availability of and access* to cutting-edge, research-based educational/instructional strategies
Why Rural Schools?

*Generally speaking, rural schools in America are:*

- susceptible to isolation, staff turnover, limited resources, and diminished access to cutting-edge innovations, teacher support and professional development;
- located in geographic settings with considerable distances between them; and
- plagued by many of the same issues facing urban areas, such as poverty, diverse learners, and low achieving schools.
Immediate Goals of R²Ed

- **To improve** rural students’ academic achievement and skills by identifying research-based methods to help teachers systematically deliver evidence-based instruction in rural settings.
- **To identify, develop and validate** strategies for improving the quality of education including challenges faced by rural schools in providing professional development and advanced training to teachers.
- **To provide** leadership to the field of rural education researchers to inform policy.
The Center’s research will focus on the schools within three areas defined by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2007):

- **Fringe** (i.e., 5 or fewer miles from an urbanized area),
- **Distant** (i.e., more than five miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area), or
- **Remote** (i.e., 25 miles from an urbanized area and also more than 10 miles from an urban center) (NCES, 2007).
Organization of R²Ed

- Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
- National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)
  - S. Sheridan, Director
- Steering Committee
- Core Leadership Team:
  - Research Operations
    - T. Glover, Director
  - Statistics and Methodology
    - J. Bovaird, Director
  - Rural Education Leadership Institute
    - G. Nugent, Director
  - Rural Outreach and Coordination
    - G. Kunz, Director

Advisory Boards:
- National Research Advisory Board
- National Leadership Advisory Board
- NE State Leadership Advisory Board

R²Ed
Research Operations (T. Glover, Director)

Develop and execute methodologically-rigorous research on rural education

- Planned studies
- Related/future studies

Apply a research framework for all studies, that includes:

- Attention to rural-relevance/uniqueness of research questions (Coladarci, 2007)
- Specification of the rural context
- The use of appropriate research methods and justifications for research conclusions
Statistics & Methodology (J. Bovaird, Director)

Goal:

- Provide state-of-the-science statistical and methodological leadership and support for rural education scientists

Accomplished by:

- Developing and evaluating methodologies that are most-appropriate for rural education research
- Providing web-based research support and educational materials on effective statistical and methodological practices
- Collaborating on current R²Ed research efforts as well as future proposals
Rural Education Leadership Institute (G. Nugent, Director)

Goals:

- Facilitate the advancement of scientific knowledge among the rural education research community
- Develop human capital for growth and use of knowledge in rural America
- Cultivate the larger research and educational communities in excellence in rural education

Components – “In”Reach and Outreach

- Conferences and research forums with proceedings, handbooks
- Visiting professorships
- Post-doctoral fellowships; pre-doctoral assistantships
- Publication of research periodicals, digests
- Web-based podcasts and other training mechanisms
Rural Outreach & Coordination (G. Kunz, Director)

Develop and maintain partnerships with rural schools

- Maintain close contact with rural sites involved in research projects
- Solicit input and involvement from rural schools and districts beyond project-specific participation

Develop and maintain partnerships with broader rural research community

- Establish national partnerships with professional organizations and associations whose specific focus is rural
- Establish local partnerships with organizations and entities that can help support and promote the high quality work being conducted through the Rural Center

Responsible for mechanisms for outreach and dissemination of rural research findings (e.g., electronic and print)
State Guidance for R²Ed Endeavors

- **Steering Committee**: help identify essential research and leadership initiatives to inform the main research foci; comprised of knowledgeable individuals with various backgrounds and differing strengths regarding issues facing rural communities, research in educational practice, and community outreach.

- **State Leadership Advisory Board**: maintain bi-directional communication and contact between community stakeholders and the R²Ed leadership team to obtain information, feedback, and recommendations for the ongoing work of the Center. Members of this board hold significant leadership positions in Nebraska, have particular expertise and investment in quality education in rural settings, and represent stakeholders at various levels.
National Guidance for R²Ed

- **National Leadership Advisory Board**: inform and be informed by critical issues and events within the national rural education research and practice communities; consisting of researchers and practitioners, this board will identify promising areas of research, development, and dissemination for the entire field. Members are stakeholders in rural education from regionally stratified areas and include researchers, members of rural education organizations, and practitioners.

- **National Research Advisory Board**: inform and be informed by the research studies and help identify research questions critical to improving rural education. Members are nationally or internationally renowned with expertise in research related to rural education.
Overview of Center Startup Activities & Initiatives

- Presentations at NREA 2009 to introduce the Rural Center and to share examples of types of research conducted through CYFS related to issues of rurality
- Nebraska Summit for Mathematics (December 2009) for Rural Education
- Presentation about the R²Ed at the Organizations Concerned with Rural Education (OCRE), national organization – March 18
- Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association (NRCSA) in Kearney, NE – March 22 – 24
- Carolyn Denton, PhD – to present at UNL on issues related to on-site and distance-delivered coaching/consultation – April 12 & 13
- IES Research Conference in June in Washington, DC
R²Ed Studies

Focus on identifying:

- Methods for getting innovative instructional techniques in the hands of rural teachers to better prepare rural students in reading and science.

- Types of support rural teachers currently receive, how they differ from urban/suburban teachers, and perceptions of supports provided.

- “Best practices” for supporting rural teachers in innovative, data-based approaches for young struggling readers.

- Extending work in STEM education to increase student curiosity and excitement about scientific fields.

- Effective family-school partnership practices and methods for expanding learning opportunities within rural communities.
Initially, planned studies will investigate:

- Variations in existing PD experiences in rural and non-rural settings, and the potential influence of PD characteristics on rural teachers’ knowledge/perceptions/practices.
- The differential effects of various PD approaches on rural teachers’ reading and science instructional knowledge and practice and student outcomes.
Study I: Professional Development Practices and Effects: A National Survey (Year 1)

**Purpose:** To investigate, via a national survey:

- Variations in existing rural PD experiences for reading, science, and mathematics instruction
- Differences in PD practices between rural and non-rural settings
- Potential influence of PD characteristics on teacher knowledge, perceptions, and practices
- How school context and teacher variables influence the outcomes of PD
Study II: Evaluation of PD Practices on Teachers Data-based Decision Making In Reading (Years 2-5)

**Purpose:** To investigate the efficacy of two variations of teacher professional development with coaching in the use of student data to inform methods by which to differentiate reading instruction for students in K-3

- Will test differential effects between professional development with *distance coaching* (using technology to reach and support teachers) versus on-site (*face-to-face*) coaching on rural teachers’ knowledge/practice and student outcomes.
Purpose: To investigate the effects of professional development in various approaches to science instruction (including guided scientific inquiry), and the benefits of coaching

Will provide evidence regarding the most effective method for teaching students in rural middle and high schools scientific concepts and processes; and determine the added value of coaching in promoting teachers’ knowledge, skills, and practice
R²Ed Foci Aligned with ESEA Reform Priorities and Initiatives

U.S. Department of Education

- Great Teachers and Leaders in Every School
- College- and Career-Ready Students
- Equity and Opportunity for all Students
- Intensive Support and Effective Interventions for Low-Performing Schools

National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)

- Teacher professional development
- Focus on content areas of reading, science, and mathematics instruction
- Focus on rural education & family-school partnerships
- Intensive support for on-going coaching for teachers for reading and science instructional approaches; & building strong communities with family-school partnerships as a means of supporting low-performing schools
What Does this Mean for Rural Educators Broadly?

- Research-based findings directing instruction in reading and science, in rural schools
- Research-based practices for supporting teachers’ acquisition and use of innovative instructional approaches in rural schools
- Connections between rural research and practice communities
- Products/deliverables such as toolkits and policy briefs
- Ongoing scholarship and training
For more information, please contact:

Dr. Susan Sheridan
Director, National Center for R²Ed
216 Mabel Lee Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68588
ssheridan2@unl.edu

or

Dr. Gina M. Kunz
Director, Rural Outreach and Coordination
gkunz2@unl.edu