

Webcast From the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center at Edvantia

**10 Million Children: Teaching and Learning in Rural Schools**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

*John Ross:*

Hello, I'm John Ross. Welcome to this webcast from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center at Edvantia, otherwise known as the ARCC. The title for today's webcast, *10 Million Children*, comes from a recent estimate of the number of students living in rural areas and learning in rural schools. Any school setting has benefits and challenges, but today, we're going to focus on how state departments of education and others can help rural communities capitalize on the advantages of rural places to address the particular educational challenges. This webcast explores this topic with a great panel of experts.

If this is your first time viewing an ARCC webcast, you may be interested in knowing that the ARCC is part of the Comprehensive Center Network funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The ARCC is one of 16 regional comprehensive centers and works in the states of Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. You can find out more information about the ARCC and the Comprehensive Center Network on the ARCC's Web site.

I'd like to begin our webcast today by introducing our panel of rural education experts. First is Dr. Doris Williams—previously the assistant dean and associate professor in the School of Education and director of University School Partnerships at North Carolina Central University. Dr. Williams is the director of Capacity Building for the Rural School and Community Trust, also known as The Rural Trust. The Rural Trust is a

nonprofit organization whose work involves young people and learning linked to their communities. It improves the quality of teaching and school leadership, advocates for appropriate state educational policies, and addresses the critical issue of funding for rural schools. In addition, she leads The Rural Trust's efforts at rural high school reform, its Rural Teacher Development Center, and its Education Renewal Zones and Connecting Schools and Communities initiatives. Welcome, Doris.

Joining us from Eastern Kentucky University is Dr. Jerry Johnson. Dr. Johnson is assistant professor of educational leadership and policy studies. He also serves as the research director for the Center for Educational Leadership in Appalachia. Dr. Johnson has published many articles on a variety of topics relating to rural education in America and has a wide range of experiences, including a Policy Research and Analysis Manager with The Rural Trust and as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal in rural schools. Thanks for joining us, Jerry.

*Jerry Johnson:* Thank you.

*John Ross:* And from Pennsylvania State University is Erin McHenry-Sorber. Ms. McHenry-Sorber obtained her master's degree at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy. For the last four years, she was a middle school reading teacher and a grant writer for a small, rural Pennsylvania school district. Currently, she is a Ph.D. student in educational leadership with a focus on rural schools and the managing editor of the *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, and a research associate for the Center on Rural Education and Communities. That's housed at the Penn State University. Ms. McHenry-Sorber and her colleague are currently completing a report for the Carsey Institute on the implications of No Child Left Behind for rural schools and districts. Welcome, Erin.

*Erin McHenry-Sorber:* Thank you.

*John Ross:* Before we begin, I'd like to point out the question box in the middle of the webcast launch page. By submitting a question in this box, you can ask our experts what's on your mind. We'll provide an opportunity for our panelists to answer your questions later in the webcast. So send in your questions at any time during the webcast and throughout today's presentation. Before we turn things over to our panel, let me tell you about one more opportunity for interaction with our webcast. On the left side of the webcast page, you'll find polling questions. We'll report those results later in the show. For now, though, please answer the very first polling question, which asks, "How do you define rural?"

We'll get those results to you soon. Now it's time to get to the substance of our webcast. The most recent data from The Rural Trust says that there are about 10 million rural school kids in America. That's roughly a fifth of the entire student population in the country. It's important not to forget the challenges and successes of folks in these rural communities, so what are some of those challenges? What particular issues do rural schools face? And what are some of the effective ways that we can deal with those issues?

## Chapter 2: Rural Research and Policy Implications

Let's first turn to Doris Williams. Doris, The Rural Trust has recently released a report titled *Why Rural Matters: The realities of rural education growth*. Please tell us a little bit about the report and what you've learned from this research.

*Doris Williams:*

Thanks, John. *Why Rural Matters* is a biannual statistical report that The Rural Trust has done for four sessions now—the most recent report, *Why Rural Matters – '07*; the previous one was in '05. But it's a comprehensive statistical report that looks at the state of rural education, state by state, in the United States. It also looks at certain community factors as they impact or correlate to student achievement and student success in rural places.

What we've found in *Why Rural Matters – '07* and before I actually say that, I want to of course acknowledge my colleague here on the panel, Jerry Johnson, who did a lot of the research that went into *Why Rural Matters*. But we used, as a definition of rural, the definition that's been used by NCES. That definition of course, like all definitions, has changed over time. The original definition was set by NCES in the '80s. And so some of the comparisons that we've done here look at the changes in rural student enrollment and rural issues around education, starting from that point, and using that as a comparison.

In '02, of course, NCES changed the definition of rural, and the definition became more space specific, geospatial, in that it relates more to where a community is located relative to an urban center or an urban cluster. And so as we looked at comparisons between the report from '07 and '05, one of the most startling things that I saw there was the change in rural student enrollment: that in fact, rural student enrollment is increasing, where a lot of times, we tend to think—or we have seen over the past decades, actually—rural student enrollment declining.

So, even based on the previous definition, if we look at comparisons between '03-04, or '02 and '03, and '03-04, we see that those figures have increased to the point that now, you see the data that approximately

10 million public school students in the United States are attending schools in places of fewer than 2500 people.

*John Ross:*

Wow.

*Doris Williams:*

So those are very small communities and so when we say rural, we're talking very small, and in many instances, also fairly isolated in terms of their proximity to urban centers. And so that 10 million students is approximately 25% of the public school population in this country. But along with that, there are also 26,000 schools. So in addition to lots of students, we're talking lots of schools.

One of the important points about the *Why Rural Matters* report is that it puts into perspective the importance of rural schools and rural children in the whole landscape of education in our country and what we're trying to do in terms of improving educational outcomes for all of our students. And while, to a large extent, rural is often overlooked, what our figures show is that if we really want to impact what's happening in education—and the bottom line in terms of what our stats look like in education—that we really have to pay attention to rural places and to rural children.

And so the question then is, how much impact does rural really have on the educational landscape that we are seeing now? One of the gauges for how important that is, is the number—as I said, 10 million students—but also in a particular state, the percentage of rural students who are in that state. And many of our states are—that we formerly thought of as rural, now of course, many of them don't consider themselves rural.

*John Ross:*

Interesting.

*Doris Williams:*

But by whatever definition, you look at rural, again, we're talking those communities of fewer than 2500 people. But 10 of the states with the highest percentage of rural students have almost 2 million students in those 10 states, which is 45% of the total enrollment of those states. Now that's only 19% of the total public school enrollment, but it's 45% of the enrollment in those 10 states. And of course included in those states are Kentucky and West Virginia, which are states of course that ARCC is working very closely with.

We also have large numbers of rural students in largely urban states. And again, we don't tend to think of rural when we think California, Florida, New York, and places like that. But in terms of numbers, a large number of our rural students—in fact, more than half of rural students in the country—are attending school in just 12 states. That's big.

The other thing that's impacting rural is the growing diversity of students in rural places. And what we're seeing in a lot of our rural communities—in fact, in 11 states including North Carolina and Virginia, which are also ARCC states—children of color making up 25% of the student enrollment. Now what that means is that large percentages of our students are coming into our public school systems, along with the correlates that we have seen for low student achievement. That's not to say that these students are low achievers or that there's something innately wrong with them. But there are correlates that go along

*John Ross:* Right.

*Doris Williams:* – achievers or that there's something innately wrong with them. But they're correlates that go along –

*John Ross:* Right.

*Doris Williams:* – with children of color, like high poverty levels and low educational attainment, low resources in those communities to support public education as well. And so we're seeing more and more of our states, our rural communities, with larger numbers and significant increases in English language learners, for example. And where the numbers may be small in some of those states, percentage-wise, it's really big. And it's challenging to those states because they've not had to deal with those kinds of English language learner issues and don't necessarily have the resources in place to deal with those.

*John Ross:* Right; it may actually be difficult with such a small population instead of a critical mass.

*Doris Williams:* Exactly. And so another thing is that with student diversity, there's a large percentage of our rural students who have IEPs—Individualized Education Plans—and so they have special needs that rural communities may or may not be able to adjust to. In Arizona, West Virginia, New Mexico, and Tennessee, for example, one in five rural students has an IEP. In Kentucky, Maine, and Florida, they're not far behind; 18% of students have IEPs. Now, we can look at some of these states and say, "Some of this is probably environmental; some of it is also economic." But then there are also the very real needs that students have that rural districts are challenged to deal with.

The socioeconomic issues, I think I mentioned very briefly, but we know that the socioeconomic challenges pull very heavily on students' ability to learn within schools. And so, much of the gap that we're seeing in—

that we talk about is the achievement gap—it's also an opportunity gap in terms of the socioeconomics within those places. And so we looked at factors like the percentage of students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch. More than half of rural students—more than half!—are eligible for subsidized meals, which is an indication of the level of poverty or income in those places. But then we also looked at factors such as adult unemployment—all of those socioeconomic things that impact on rural places. What we also found is that those places where students and families are most in need, their communities are also highly challenged in terms of economics as well. And so there's a tremendous need for resources from both inside to be redirected, but tremendous need for an influx of resources to support those places. The poorer and more diverse the rural student population, the less success they're having in terms of standardized tests—those things, of course, that No Child Left Behind considers important as indicators of student success.

So in looking at all of those factors, several states, of course, rose to the top as high-priority states that needed to address rural issues in order to impact their overall education. And three of them are your states—North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

The last point that I really want to make is that we look at the numbers and we're in awe. But I really want to make a point that behind each of these numbers, behind every number, there's a face; there's a child.

*John Ross:*

Right.

*Doris Williams:*

And so even if the numbers were not 10 million strong, each of these children deserves an opportunity that's not been afforded them because of where they happen to be born or happen to live.

*John Ross:*

Thanks, Doris. That was really helpful. Before we go to our next guest, this is a good opportunity to look at the results from that first polling question. If you remember, we asked the question, "How do you define rural?" And Doris gave us a shifting view of how that definition's come about. 25% said "Any non-metro area." And it'd be kind of hard to define what "metro" is in some places, anymore. 25% said, "An area that is 5 or more miles from an urbanized area, or 2.5 miles or more from an urban cluster." 38% said, "An area with fewer than 2500 residents." And 13% said, "If you think you're rural, you're rural." And I have to say that at one point, Doris, before I met you and had gone through that session with you, I kind of agreed with the last one, because I thought I lived in a rural place and found out that maybe it's a little bit not in the demographic that this report, or some of the reports, are about.

I'd like to thank everybody for participating in that polling question. The great thing about webcasting is that it gives you, our audience, an opportunity to participate. So here's another way to participate. Remember, use the question form on the webcast page. Doris or any of our panelists will be able to answer those questions after we hear their presentations. But first, let's watch a short video to get an idea of how staff at Pike County Schools in Pikeville, Kentucky, provide services that are unique to their rural situation.

*VIDEO Osborne:*

I'm Robert Osborne; I'm federal programs coordinator for Pike County Schools. Our central office is here in Pikeville, Kentucky. Pike County School District is located in the far eastern section of Kentucky. We're real close neighbors with the state of West Virginia as well as the state of Virginia. We have the claim to fame that we are the largest county, geographically, east of the Mississippi River.

Pike County School System consists of 15 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 5 high schools, and 2 day treatment facilities. We have a total enrollment of 9,638 students. Of those 9,638 students, 62% of those students qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. We feel that we offer a quality education to our students here in Pike County. We meet the Kentucky curriculum that we have. Our school district at this present time is not "in improvement." We have met our AYP goals, and we feel like we're doing a great job here in Pike County with our instruction.

The challenges of meeting No Child Left Behind are no different anywhere in this nation than they are right here in Pike County. And meetings that I've attended, sitting at roundtable discussions, all schools face the same challenge with NCLB, and that is trying to reduce or eliminate achievement gaps—achievement gaps among disability and nondisability students, and also among free-and-reduced-lunch students and those who do not receive free and reduced lunch. Those gaps are hard to eliminate, and we struggle with that also. But we are meeting that challenge.

*VIDEO Osborne:*

We feel like we use our Title I Funds and other federal funds effectively. Two or three things that I'd like to mention: One is our TISes, which are Technology Integration Specialists.

*VIDEO Osborne:*

We fund those with rural or low-income monies. They work in our schools to provide job-embedded PD on site, with our teachers. Their task is to integrate technology into the instructional day. We've seen great successes with that. We use our Title I monies to work closely with our health coordinator here. This area has a high percentage of cardiovascular disease and obesity. We work real close with them to provide training for our parents and our students about the dangers of

those two areas. One of the neat things that we're doing with our Title I money is we have a Read to Me program, where we actually work closely with a local hospital. Our parent involvement coordinator makes three trips a week to the hospital, and she presents newborn mothers and parents with a reading packet that encourages them to begin reading with their kids right away. At this point, we're up to about 4,000 babies that we have served through our Read to Me program.

But I think one of the things that's most often overlooked with Title I is the fact that through Title I monies in this district, we're able to place 40 certified, highly qualified teachers out in our schools to work with our kids. And they do a great job. And that's just some of the ways that we're using our Title I monies.

*VIDEO Slater:*

I'm Cheryl Slater, and I'm a District Technology Integration Specialist. I work for the Pike County School District. I have been in technology for, let's see, since 1989, and started this program 7 years ago. And what my job is, is to work with teachers to help them incorporate technology into their classrooms, to make it more meaningful for the teacher and the student, and to let them have the accessibility to real-world things, because we have to get them ready for life.

In working in a rural area as I do, it is, I think, kind of beneficial because you know the teachers, you take part in their lives, and it's kind of like a Dr. Phil kind of situation because when you walk in their classrooms in the morning, they want to tell you about their problems. You know, you take on their problems. You always have to remember someone in prayer. That is a big thing, you know; well, don't forget to pray for this one or that one for me. And it's the camaraderie we have in our district and the people, and you know them and you care about them. And I think that's the main thing in being in rural areas; you have that closeness.

*VIDEO Osborne:*

What's unique about living in Pike County and working here is the culture. We have a culture here of close-knit families, close-knit communities. It's not at all uncommon for some of our older teachers who have been in the system for 25-plus years to be teaching a third-generation student. And not only do they teach that third-generation student, they're still in contact with the mother and perhaps the grandmother. And so we have a closeness here that you don't find everywhere. Everybody knows everybody, and you go to the supermarket, you run into somebody you know. And I think that what makes it neat to work here in Pike County, you know, this is home.

*John Ross:*

I think Robert and Cheryl do a great job in the video of giving us a glimpse into their rural school system in Kentucky. So now, I want to

turn to you, Jerry, because you also specialize in the Appalachian region, just like those of us who work in the ARCC. So Jerry, please talk to us a little bit about rural policy issues that are impacting Appalachia.

*Jerry Johnson:*

Thanks, John. One key policy issue that's having a dramatic effect now is related to changes in the Title I formula that have come about recently. As Doris shared, poverty and socioeconomic conditions are a serious barrier in rural schools and communities. Title I is the nation's frontline program in providing additional resources to help combat some of those challenges. In 2002, some changes were made to the Title I formula that were intended to target schools and communities with higher concentrations of children in poverty. It's a noble idea; however, some specific elements of the formula have created some perverse effects that have shifted resources away from smaller, often rural, often poorer school districts to larger districts and urban areas.

In total, about \$245 million gets shifted from 950 larger districts nationwide to 10,000 smaller and often poorer districts. The effects are caused by a provision in two of the subgrants (the targeted subgrant and the EFIG subgrant) that use a weighted formula to weight student count in terms of Title I eligibility. Under the provisions in this formula, a district's total Title I student count is computed using either the percentage poverty among the child population in that district or the total number of eligible children. And the result is that larger districts have their children weighted more. There's a heavier weight for their children, and so it moves money in that way. We've included some links that I think are going to be available to people that really get into the specifics and the minutia of the formula, but I would like to share a couple of numbers to help characterize this issue.

*John Ross:*

Those links are available on the webcast launch page.

*Jerry Johnson:*

Okay. I would point out that this issue does not affect the total allocation for a state or the total allocation for the U.S. Actually, the formula is used to determine the size of the pie afforded to each district, and then however much money gets allocated for Title I flows through that. So it creates a zero-sum gain. So as larger districts get a heavier weight, those resources are getting shifted away from someplace else.

So take a look at some numbers. Oh, and the issue is particularly acute in Appalachian states because this plays out in a stronger way in states where you have a sparsely populated, higher poverty, rural area of the state, and then one or just a few urban areas in other parts of the state. The results are particularly dramatic in a state like that, which is what a lot of Appalachian states look like.

So, to look at some numbers, I want to compare two districts in Kentucky that can help shed light on this. Jefferson County is the state's most populated urban area. It's Louisville. Their school district serves an estimated 21,991 Title I eligible children. They've got about a 19% poverty rate. We can compare Jefferson County with Corbin Independent School District, which is located in a small Appalachian community in Whitley County, Kentucky. Corbin has a 20% poverty rate, slightly higher, but only serves about 370 [Title I] eligible children. If the Title I count were used—or if the standard kind of Title I count of just looking at the total number of children were used—then you'd get a [situation in which] each kid is worth, in terms of Title I dollars, about the same amount. Under the standard percentage weighting formula, each child in Corbin is worth about 1.2 children in the eligibility count; and in Jefferson County, it's 1.1. So they're very, very close. However, since 2002, with implementation of the weighted formulas and the targeted EFIG, a separate Title I count is computed, based on the total number of children, with categories that add additional weighting as you have more children who are eligible. Under that formula, because there are nearly 22,000 eligible children in Louisville, some count as much as 2.5 times in the formula.

*John Ross:* Wow.

*Jerry Johnson:* In fact, over half of Jefferson County's Title I eligible kids count as 2.5 in the formula. So running through the weighted formula based on total number of kids, the net weight for a child in Louisville, in Jefferson County, is 2.25 children. Because the formula takes whichever count is most beneficial to the district, Jefferson County gets that 2.25 weight per child. Corbin—because it doesn't have the total number of children to get into those higher weighting categories—remains at its 1.2. So the net result is, a kid in Jefferson County—or the allocation in Jefferson County—is based on children being weighted at almost double what they are in Corbin.

*John Ross:* I'd like to emphasize that you said Kentucky would get a set amount, and that's how Kentucky would allot that—the state would allot that money.

*Jerry Johnson:* Yes, the state would allot it through this formula. So Kentucky will get a dollar amount, and the dollar amount will go, based on this weighting. And so, in Jefferson County, you're gonna get more money per Title I eligible kid than you are in Corbin, despite the fact that the kids face the same challenges—the same level of challenges, if not greater challenges—in Corbin. Now there are certainly a lot more economically disadvantaged children in Jefferson County than there are in Corbin. But

there are a lot more places like Corbin in Kentucky than there are places like Jefferson County.

*John Ross:* Right, and it reminds me of what Doris said earlier about critical mass—that in a place where you may have so few English language learners, or so few students with IEPs, that you may not have the resources—whereas when you have a critical mass, you might actually have a way to address some of those things.

*Jerry Johnson:* Yeah, and getting those kinds of programs to places like Corbin is more challenging because you don't have that critical mass, and it would suggest a need for additional resources, not fewer resources. As a way of looking at the impact of this funding formula on Appalachian Kentucky, I aggregated the data for the 70 Appalachian districts in Kentucky and looked at how they compare—under the provisions of this formula—with Jefferson County and found that, first, the 70 Appalachian districts in Kentucky have a poverty level of about 26%.

*John Ross:* Wow.

*Jerry Johnson:* And I would emphasize that we're not talking here about free and reduced meal rate, which is the typical measure of poverty that education researchers use. Title I is actually based around census poverty level among the population of children ages 5 to 17. So that's a much lower threshold. Free and reduced meal rate, I think, is about 185% of the poverty level, so 26% is a very high poverty level based on the census measure. And Appalachian Kentucky serves some of the most impoverished communities in the U.S. So, with a 26% poverty level, versus Jefferson County's 19% poverty level, still—because the children in these Appalachian districts are dispersed in rural communities—very few of the districts are able to access some of those higher weighting categories. And so, it plays out a very similar way to what we see when we compare Corbin with Jefferson County. The net result is, you've got—with the use of this formula—Jefferson County benefiting to the tune of about \$3 million, and the 70 Appalachian districts losing about \$3 million.

*John Ross:* ...and that had to come from somewhere, right?

*Jerry Johnson:* Yeah, yeah, it's a zero-sum gain.

*John Ross:* Right.

*Jerry Johnson:* We know that Title I is the frontline program in trying to ameliorate the effects of poverty and helping kids to get to high levels of achievement. The effects of this formula, and the way it shifts resources around within

a state, really has a potential to undermine some of the wonderful things we see happening in places like Pike County.

*John Ross:*

Right, like in Pike County. Wow, Jerry, you and Doris both give us some really interesting numbers to think about and challenges. I'm really glad you could be with us today.

I do want to remind the audience that we want to really encourage you to be interactive and that we can do that through this webcast in a couple of ways. This is a great opportunity for us and for our webcast audience to go to the launch page and to answer our second polling question. On the left side of that page, please answer the second polling question, "What do you think is the most pressing issue that rural schools in your state face?" The answer opportunities are "funding constraints, recruiting or retaining quality administrators and teachers, the increase in the numbers of English language learners, or finding quality accessible professional development." We'll share the results of that polling question in a few minutes. But first, we have a very interesting video to show you from another high school—one that features two high school agricultural classes in Woodbury, Tennessee. This short video will give you a quick picture of some pretty unique programs that are going on in Cannon County High School.

*VIDEO Parsley:*

My name is Kim Parsley. I'm the principal here at Cannon County High School in Woodbury, Tennessee. We have a student population of approximately 775 students. I've been the principal here for 4 years. Since I've been here, we have added this greenhouse that was built by our students, and we're really excited to have you here today.

I think when you live and work in a rural setting, you become very close to the teachers and students because the community is small, so you see them in every aspect of your life, not just in the school aspect. You worship with them, you shop with them. Every event that comes along, the whole community is pretty much involved in. So you see everybody regularly, and you see the whole family, not just the students or their parents. Grandparents, aunts, uncles—the extended family is also very involved when you live in a rural community. I think that that's an advantage because you really get to know the students and where they come from. You have a much clearer insight of why they do the things they do and think the way that they think, when you get to know the whole family, not just the student.

*VIDEO Nichols:*

My name is Courtney Nichols. I teach at Cannon County High School in Woodbury, Tennessee. And I teach horticulture and landscaping. The greenhouse project started 4 years ago. With the assistance of our Director of Schools and the support from our school board, we were able

to construct a 30 by 60 greenhouse. The students constructed all of the greenhouse themselves, which saved the county \$17,000, which helped our small county out tremendously. We serve approximately 100 students each year.

There are many facets with the agriculture curriculum in Tennessee. There are 23 different classes that can be offered. And in Cannon County, we decided to offer the greenhouse courses because we are 30 miles from the nursery capital of the world. And also, they're phasing out the tobacco industry, and so we needed to find another outlet for these students to make a living.

*VIDEO Melton:*

My name's Bob Melton, and I teach at Cannon County High School in Woodbury, Tennessee. I'm one of three agriculture education teachers here at this school, and my main focus is in agri-science. I do teach other courses in leadership, sales and service, wildlife, and forestry.

Our main ingredients that we need for bio-diesel is used cooking oil from one of the local fast food restaurants. We use the vegetable oil. I got interested in the bio-diesel when gas prices started going up, and since we are involved in agriculture, we are probably the first conservationist that was ever in the United States, 'cause farmers conserve everything they can, from top to bottom. And it just sounded good that we could take a resource that was of no good to anyone and wind up making a product out of it that we can use back on our farm. The students are involved in most every step of it—from collecting the oil at the restaurants to actually making the bio-diesel. And right now, we are running it into tractors here at school, for our lawnmowers, and hopefully next year, it'll get up to the stage where we're gonna be running our buses off of it, and really saving the tax payers of this county a lot of money.

*VIDEO Nichols:*

One of the benefits that my students receive from this class is that they get a hands-on experience. We try to teach real-world experiences to these students. And we feel that if we can engage the students in a real-world experience, then learning truly takes place. One of the things the students learn from [is] "how much does it cost to fill the flats, and how much does each plant cost us?" They learn how to properly take care of these plants, and they also learn how to market and sell their skills by a plant sale that we have in April.

*VIDEO Parsley:*

We were recently approached by the Stones River Watershed Association, who asked us if we would be interested in having our students go out and collect native plant seedlings, bring them to our greenhouse, and propagate them so that they could use them to replant streambeds where there has either been erosion or it's been taken over

by unwanted plants. They're trying to clean out the Stones River streambed and replant it with plants that are native to the area. We didn't have the goal in mind of propagating native plants to help Stones River Watershed Association, but when they came to us, we saw it as an obvious fit and another way to involve kids in their community because it gets them out to the Stones River, which is our water source here in the community, and it also goes on to Rutherford County, into Nashville.

Having projects such as the greenhouse project and the bio-diesel project helps our community and our school because it gets the students so much more motivated and involved in their school community. They want to come and work on this; it's not unusual to see kids here on Saturday, watering the plants, so it's really a draw to keep them in school. With both the bio-diesel and the greenhouse project, we meet goals because there are so many science standards embedded in planting the plants and making sure that the soil is appropriate for the plants. Also, the measurements for the bio-diesel—there's a lot of chemistry in that project, so we're not just meeting [standards]—we're going above and beyond our standards with these two projects.

*John Ross:*

I was fortunate enough to visit Cannon County High School and meet those great educators and students. It was a lot of fun, and it was really great to see the work these people are doing, and the very positive effect that they're having on their school and their community. They go well beyond just these two projects.

The way they've taken their state standards and created projects designed to meet the content relevant to their rural students is really impressive.

Erin, you've done quite a lot a bit of research on the implications of No Child Left Behind on rural schools, particularly how—in respect to the state curriculum standards—it impacts teachers' ability to provide real-world contexts like we saw.

*Erin McHenry-Sorber:* Thanks, John. I think Cannon High School is a wonderful example of a school working with and for its community. It's responding to community needs, it's meeting the standards, and it's also preparing its students for life in the community after school. It responds to community environmental needs, through the planting of the native plants for the watershed association. It responds to community economic strain, through student-produced bio-diesel, and student construction of the greenhouse, and it also responds to potential community needs by teaching the students different forms of agriculture in response to the inevitable decline of the tobacco industry in the region. And it really incorporates the community into the curriculum. So it teaches the

standards in a way that's meaningful for students. They use various science standards in the greenhouse, they use math standards in their sales of greenhouse plants, they use language arts skills in their marketing techniques, and they're also using chemistry skills in their bio-diesel production.

*John Ross:* And the kids will tell you that, too, when you talk to them.

*Erin McHenry-Sorber:* And so, not only is it teaching the standards and helping the community, it's also preparing students for life **after** school in their community. It's preparing them to become economically successful and innovative community participants. It's teaching them to value their rural lands in agricultural traditions. It's training them to be responsive to community needs, and it's also teaching them to be problem solvers, which will be important when they become future community leaders.

So the educators at this school appear to be operating on the assumption that connecting curriculum to the community will increase student achievement.

*John Ross:* Exactly.

*Erin McHenry-Sorber:* This is not a typical response by rural districts to the pressures of state-mandated tests. More typically—because of size and poverty factors both Doris and Jerry mentioned as having negative effects on student achievement on standardized tests—schools will respond by turning their focus toward test preparation in the way their school day is structured and in their classroom instruction.

So, not only does this have the effect of distancing the school from the community, because schoolwork is disconnected from community work, but it also alters classrooms. In my district, for example, my school reduced nontested subject time in order to create more time for test preparation, and teachers in tested subjects were really pressured to alter their instruction to focus on test content.

So, for example, in my school, we eliminated one day of social studies per week in the middle school for more math test prep. And we eliminated science from the elementary school to allow for more time for reading and math.

Those of us in tested subjects—and I taught reading, which is tested—were under great pressure to boost our students' scores. Not only was it important for us to make AYP, but it was also important for us to score higher than our neighboring districts, because the local newspaper

ranked our performance as schools based on our students' test performance.

So, the way for us to do this was to focus on tests and content. For example, the woman who taught next to me taught the whole math textbook by March, so that students were prepared for all the content that would be found on the test. After March, she would go back and teach everything she thought was important, but that wasn't tested.

We were encouraged to use state-released sample items (test items) in our instruction, to use commercially prepared test-prep materials, and to begin each class with a sample test item to focus our students.

So, of course, my district is not alone in this. The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy conducted a survey of 12,000 teachers nationwide, looking at how the pressures of these tests affect their instruction. In high-stakes states, 92% of teachers said they felt pressured from their superintendent to raise scores; 79% of elementary and 77% of middle school teachers said, under this pressure, they have little time to teach anything besides what was going to be on the test; 69% said they use commercially prepared test-prep materials; and 75% even changed their classroom assessments to mimic those state assessments.

So, rural schools increasingly are focusing their efforts on test performance at the school and classroom levels, and largely leaving the community out of the equation, very unlike Cannon County High School, which we saw in the video. In fact, one administrator explained to us at the Center on Rural Education and Communities, "All this talk about community in schools is well and good, but if it doesn't raise scores, it's not really relevant to my job." This view obviously diverges radically from that of the administrators and the teachers at Cannon County High School. They see the advantages of valuing the community and using it in their curriculum and instruction. They see the connection between the inclusion of their students' community experience and values and learning, including learning those skills found on their state tests. They also see the inclusion in the community and curriculum as a great motivator, to keep students engaged in school.

So not only does providing students with the opportunity to connect school and community increase achievement, that also allows students to see their communities as viable options to live and work, which does great things for the relationship between the school and the community.

*John Ross:*

And that's definitely what we saw in Cannon County.

*Erin McHenry-Sorber:* Absolutely. So if rural schools can reclaim their role as community partners—like they’re doing in Cannon County—they can aid in community development, can provide youth with the tools they need to positively contribute to their communities, can train potential community leaders to resolve community issues, and at the same time they’re doing all those things, they can enhance student academic achievement.

*John Ross:* Thanks, Erin. Really great information. We’ve been receiving your questions, but before we get to those, let’s review some of the results from our second polling question. If you recall, we asked, “What do you think is the most pressing issue that rural schools in your state face?” 20% said funding constraints, kind of in relation to what Jerry was talking about; 73% said recruiting and retaining quality administrators and teachers (that’s a whopping number); 7% said increase in numbers of English language learners; and, amazingly, 0% said finding quality accessible professional development. So, obviously the “quality teachers and administrators” was of great concern for the people in the audience.

So I’d like to begin with a question about that. We do have a question that simply asks, “What working condition factors affect rural teacher retention? How can we get more highly qualified and effective teachers in rural situations?” Would anybody like to field that one?

*Doris Williams:* Retention—so that is, once the teachers are there, how do we get them to stay? Well, there’s a limited amount of research on why teachers leave rural communities, as well as why they go there or don’t go there. But one of the things that we notice is that teachers often feel isolated in rural communities. Young teachers, in particular, can’t find spouses; they can’t find housing; they feel professionally disconnected from a larger community. And so there are lots of challenges around that. When young people come in or other teachers come in who may be married, their spouses are often unable to find employment. So there’s a tremendous kind of economic impact on them, and also social impact, when they come into these communities. But also, one of the things that we hear a lot from teachers has to do with the level of administrative support and their ability or a lack of ability to participate in decision making and to feel like a professional in the places where they are.

So I think there are lots of things that communities can do that are outside of the purview of the school itself, that can provide a more welcoming kind of atmosphere for teachers that would also impact upon their feelings as professionals. So partnering with communities is a really important piece in terms of retaining teachers and making teachers feel welcome and wanted in the place that they are, once they get there.

Of course, pay always helps. But that's seldom a factor that teachers would list in the top one or two reasons for not staying in a place.

*John Ross:*

Right. And when we go and talk to the students in Hancock County, and we talk to the teachers who are there, we ask them what's unique about living there. And some of the teachers that we heard from today—I wish we could have shown you all the footage we got, or you could come visit with us to these schools—but they'll say, "Well, I grew up here. I was born and raised in this place, and this place is very important to me." And they didn't think that, at first, was unique, but that is a very unique thing, that a person feels such a great bond that they want to stay there and come back and work there.

I know that we have been working in what we call "the coal fields" of West Virginia and Virginia, with a National Science Foundation project. And that was built on the idea of "grow your own." Grow your own teachers, especially science and math teachers. And the statistic that program director taught me was that many students will go to college within 90 miles of where they graduate, and then if they're in education programs, they'll go back and teach within 90 miles of where they graduate from that college. And so that clearly places them within the region of being able to come back to where they were [raised].

*Doris Williams:*

Well, I think a lot of young people want to come back or want to be where they grew up. But there are a lot of things that pull them away. For example, many of our students, and more and more students now, are coming out of school with larger and larger student loans, for example. And with the low resources in many of our communities and the way salary scales are structured in many of our states, teachers in rural communities make less money. And so they have a more difficult time trying to balance out the cost of living of a particular place against paying back student loans and those kinds of things. And so they get pulled, lots of times, by districts very close to them that are able to pay higher wages, not necessarily because they want to be in those larger and more urbanized districts often, but because economically, financially, they find it more attractive to be there.

*John Ross:*

In our region, sometimes that's even across states.

*Doris Williams:*

Exactly.

*John Ross:*

Some states will pull teacher candidates from another state. And I thought I lived in a rural area, and I think it's still pretty kind of rural, if I go by that last definition we had. And I would say that while the teacher salary there may not be as competitive as say, northern Virginia, in comparison to where I live in Virginia, but there are other financial

benefits. Housing costs are low, the cost of living is low, I don't have to drive as much. So, it's hard, I know, if I was starting out my career, to intellectualize that. Maybe I'd probably want to live in another part of Virginia where I did start my career, but maybe we need to get those messages out.

*Jerry Johnson:* If I could –

*John Ross:* Sure, Jerry.

*Jerry Johnson:* I'm gonna add that the grow-your-own model works for recruiting and retaining administrators also.

*John Ross:* Oh, good.

*Jerry Johnson:* There are some successful models for doing that. In Kentucky, there's quite a bit of work around codesigning and codelivering graduate programs to prepare school and district leaders, where the universities are talking with and working with current practitioners to identify teachers who've demonstrated the kind of leadership potential that can produce principals and superintendents who can really be instructional leaders.

*John Ross:* Exactly.

*Jerry Johnson:* It's a very similar model.

*John Ross:* And I—my bias is, obviously; well, it may not be obvious to you—but it's technology. And we've actually done some work in the state of Alabama where they're working on that model—the distributed leadership academy—where they have teacher leaders working with principals all across the state. They're in three-member teams at a school and getting information from a distance. So the state is providing information and they have an expert facilitator, expert educator, who they can turn to, to get that information. So they're doing a grow-your-own model, I think, as well, from all across the state. So, some good ideas. We had some good ideas on that one.

Jerry, we have some interest in the formulas that you talked about. This person may not have realized this—the Title I funding and how it is coming about. Is there any way they can find out more information about those figures? I know you said that it was kind of detailed information.

*Jerry Johnson:* Sure, there are links to a couple of white papers that sort of explain how the formula works in a narrative, but that also include tables—one

includes a table. There's a link at The Rural Trust Web site that will actually allow people to look and see the impact on an individual district. It's a spreadsheet, an analysis that was conducted by the Congressional Research Service to show the difference in the funding that would be provided to each district under a percentage-only formula or the current formula, which is percentage or absolute numbers. So they can look at an individual district under that.

*Jerry Johnson:* Great. And so actually, all those numbers that you were giving us earlier, are not just national numbers.

*Doris Williams:* No, also the *Why Rural Matters* report has individual state pages. So you could go—that's also on The Rural Trust Web site—and pull up your particular state and see all of the indicators that I mentioned, and the priority ranking for rural in your state.

*John Ross:* I have a question that is kind of a growing need in some of our states and, ironically—if we read the data correctly—is not as strong in one of our states as the other four, and that is, how do rural areas address the lack of qualified or certified teachers to work with English language learners? Some of those numbers are increasing in our states. Some of our states are actually [have] the fastest increasing populations of English language learners. Some of these students have not only limited English, but they're also poor. What can states do to help address the instruction of English language learners?

*Jerry Johnson:* I would highlight two points there, and then maybe we can build on that. One would be using that Alabama model, for instance, that you discussed—using technology, for the universities or for the places where there are people with the capacity to build other people's skills in providing ELL instruction. The problem is, in these rural communities where people are getting an influx of ELL students and they don't have teachers who are certified or qualified, they don't have access to a university or to some kind of training facility where they are. It's not as simple in a rural area as getting someone from the university to provide professional development. So, some innovative approaches to delivery by the university, using some technology.

The other point I would make is looking to the community. Broadening our idea of who's a teacher and who can contribute. In a lot of these communities, they're going to have native speakers, bilingual community members, and drawing on some of those resources. And there are of course indirect benefits to that, just in terms of the relationship between the school and the community.

*John Ross:*

I'm going to offer a shameless plug and say there's a great English Language Learner webcast on the ARCC Web site. There's an archive available—some similar ideas on there and some visits to schools, one very urban, and one more rural—I wouldn't call it rural, specifically, with some strategies those teachers have used. Anybody else addressing the English language learner question? You had mentioned earlier, Doris, about the fact that if you have one or two English language learners coming into a situation—or even if it's students that just have different characteristics or different needs than you had before—you just don't have the capacity to deal with that. And it takes a certain number for you to get appropriate funding, to hire a teacher, so I could see that's a big challenge in a rural area.

*Doris Williams:*

And I think what Jerry said about partnering with universities is a good thing. If there's not a higher ed institution, usually in a lot of our places, there are junior colleges or community colleges that are in much closer proximity to these rural school districts, and sometimes we overlook the potential that those institutions hold for helping to address some of the issues.

Also, at the agencies in the community, many of our social service agencies, for example, have bilingual workers who could provide that kind of [help]. But it goes beyond into, as Jerry was talking about, what states define as who can be a teacher, and what school districts feel that they can do in terms of pulling in community resources around that.

And I think higher ed has provided a really good model for what may be possible in some of those schools. I mean, we all in higher ed hire adjunct faculty members who may or may not have the PhDs, but they have a lot of expertise. So they're not compromising on the quality of instruction that's being provided to students. But then an associate professor, a full professor, may be the teacher of record, so that the adjunct actually has a mentor, in a sense, but you're also providing a teacher, an instructor, in an area of need. You may be releasing a faculty member where you may not have the resources to hire a full faculty member. And a lot of times, we aren't able, in these rural school districts, to hire a full-time teacher to teach three or four or 10 students, and so we have to be creative about defining who can go into the classroom.

*John Ross:*

Maybe relying on paraprofessionals and having highly trained paraprofessionals?

*Doris Williams:*

Highly trained paraprofessionals, but you know, targeting those people who have the skills and the knowledge to do it, but don't see themselves

as teachers, and that we have not traditionally considered teachers in the classroom.

*John Ross:*

Right. And I know in those states where those populations are increasing, more and more rural areas are having to face that, so it's a really important question.

Some of the programs we saw today, like those in Cannon County, the bio-diesel project and the greenhouse project, are real interesting. But the school says, well, it's really hard to get one of those projects started. And how do I go about doing that? And I have some advice from them. But have any of you worked with establishing some of those programs?

*Doris Williams:*

Yeah, part of what we do in the Capacity Building Program of The Rural Trust is to help schools do this kind of teaching and learning. We call it place-based learning or learning with public purpose. And the idea, of course, is to connect the work that kids are doing in school to community development kinds of needs or other social needs within their place.

What it takes, first of all, is an interest in doing something different and a willingness to do something different, to break out of the box. There are multiple entry points into this kind of work. We have examples. For example, in Louisiana, the impetus for the work came from the fact that students were not scoring well on their science end-of-grade test. And so they were looking for a way to do that. So they started with the standards, and then looked for a pedagogy that would match that. We have other places, still in Louisiana, for example, where young people actually started a free tax filing service center, based on what they saw as a need in their community—large numbers of people not getting their earned income tax credits, or elderly people who were taking care of children not getting their child-care credits on their federal taxes. So the need can come from any place.

But what is needed, I think, more than anything else, is an understanding of what place-based learning is, or what project-based learning is, what it does or doesn't look like. And so pulling together a critical number of teachers, administrators, community people, and young people—that's been our approach. And we bring them into a training process so that they're doing an intensive, maybe institute in the summer, so they're understanding what it looks like. They're able to align it with their standards across disciplines. And that's one of the things that's really exciting about this kind of work. It's because it is much more efficient than trying to teach individual subjects in isolation of each other. But it does take some seed money to get some of these projects underway—not a lot of seed money, though.

*John Ross:* That's exactly what they said.

*Doris Williams:* Yeah.

*John Ross:* It does take some money to get started up, but they are looking at these projects in terms of sustainability. And buy-in from the community was really important. And once you have buy-in from the community—maybe the school board or however you're governed—they said that seed money gets you started, and really sustaining the program has been much less difficult than just getting it kicked off.

*Doris Williams:* And that's what I think we've seen in Cannon County. I mean, it's really exciting to see them go from starting a greenhouse to the kind of work that they're doing. And once that kind of teaching and learning takes on in a community, it does become self-sustaining because there's more and more demand for the services of the school and the students.

*John Ross:* Right. And I think they also did a good job of talking about the content standards. And I love how the principal Mrs. Parsley mentioned going above and beyond. I think that's something Erin had mentioned, that they've really thought about what are the math and the science and even the liberal arts standards. And so, Erin, this question is, what are some recommendations for how rural schools can involve or develop programs like that, that really address those standards? How can we address those standards?

*Erin McHenry-Sorber:* Well, I think first of all, rural schools provide a really great place for engagement with the community. Because historically, the rural school has been the social center of the community, it provides a junction for intergenerational identity and experience, and in many cases, the rural school is the main source of employment for a rural community.

*John Ross:* It is in many rural areas we work with, yeah.

*Erin McHenry-Sorber:* So rural community members are already tightly connected to their school. And so it becomes the job of the school, in some instances, to go out and look for places to really make those connections more formal, whether it's business partnerships or partnerships with churches, or incorporating different facets of the community into the curriculum. So if you're going from a standards perspective, you know, take math for example, there are a myriad of math standards and skills that students need to learn. And so you can take any community and look at, you know, what are the demographic changes in the community? What is the business model in the community? Are people coming or going? What

are the job prospects? There are a just a ton of ways that you can use any content standard to view the community.

*John Ross:* And I think we saw that illustrated where they knew one industry is going away, and they—being invested in the rural area which they lived—they wanted to stay in that area, and so they were looking for ways for the kids to stay there. And that propagated additional avenues with the watershed project, bringing in natural plants to replace the invasive plants. I thought that was just a great connection. And the kids themselves, they'll tell you about, "Oh, I practice my public speaking, and we have to look at language arts standards, and how to communicate with people, whether it's in print or verbally," and of course science and math and a lot of that.

*Erin McHenry-Sorber:* And the more you can get students involved in every aspect of the project, the more invested they become, not only in academic work, but also in the community.

*John Ross:* Right. Well, this one, I have to say that I agreed with. Specifically, this person was surprised to hear that rural populations are increasing. And I think, Doris, you said that the perception is they might be decreasing. Do you have any information on why they're increasing or where they're increasing? How is that increase being measured?

*Doris Williams:* Well, I think in many of our places, the increase is an influx of new residents, new immigrants. In many of our states, North Carolina, for example, is one of those states.

*John Ross:* Tied to our ELL question.

*Doris Williams:* Tied, yes. Yeah. But there are other things that are keeping people in communities, where before, they were kind of draining out of those communities. And I think Jerry probably can expand on that.

*Jerry Johnson:* Yeah, a lot of the communities where the growth is occurring, where there's actually more rural people living in a community than there were, say 10 years ago. Those are communities that are not terribly isolated. They tend to be sort of around the fringe of not quite urban fringe, but maybe one step removed from an urban fringe. And I think it reflects people looking for a quality of life that they can get in those kinds of communities, while still having some access to urban amenities. And it reflects what we know about schools that are of moderate size, and schools that have close relationships with communities—they tend to do better. People, I think, are seeking educational opportunities for their kids to be in some of those kinds of communities, or some of those kinds of schools in those communities. So yeah, I think it's largely a

conscious decision on the part of people to live in communities of that size and in that type of locale.

*John Ross:*

Well, unfortunately, we can probably talk about this for much longer, but we're kind of out of time, so I do want to mention there's a free webinar next week by The Rural Trust entitled, "Title I Funding Formula Issues Affecting Rural Districts." Very closely related to Jerry's presentation today. The webinar's on Wednesday, March 26, at 1 p.m. Eastern Time. There's a link to the webinar on the webcast launch page, so please sign up for that and look forward to that information.

I do want to thank Doris and Erin and Jerry for coming in and being our guests today. I would also like to thank the students and teachers that we met today from Pikeville County Schools and Cannon County High School.

I also want to thank my colleagues, Caitlin Howley and Laurene Johnson, who coordinated today's webcast. This webcast will also be archived on the ARCC Web site within a day or so. It takes us a little while to get those files ready, but you can return to it as a resource for you and your colleagues.

Our development team would really appreciate it if you take the short evaluation survey, which can be found on the launch page. We use that information to help shape and improve these webcasts. And our next webcast on issues related to teacher quality is on Thursday, June 26, so please be on the lookout for an announcement about that.

For the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center, I'm John Ross.