

# Rural Teacher Corps Project:

## Stakeholder Dialogue

*How do we work together to strengthen the recruitment, preparation, placement, and retention of outstanding teacher-leaders?*



# Event Summary

## Rural Teacher Corps Project

On June 13-14, a group of rural school and community activists gathered on the campus of Dakota Wesleyan University to discuss how they might create a better future for their rural schools and communities. At the center of their discussions was the essential question: *How do we work together to strengthen the recruitment, preparation, and placement/retention of future rural teacher-leaders?*

People showed up, not because Mitchell, SD was an exotic location or because attending was a path to career advancement. They showed up because they wanted to figure out how they might be part of an effort to develop *rural teacher corps* that focus on filling rural schools with talented teacher-leaders. They showed up because they care about rural schools and communities.

Participants left with projects and ideas, which they intend to work on in their own individual schools, communities, and colleges. They formed a network dedicated to cause, and provided valuable insights to the Rural Schools Collaborative on how they can help inspire the development and success of more rural teacher corps projects.

### Participants Facts

- 69 Participants from 9 States
- 44 People from 16 States participate in the TweetChat at #RuralTeacher Corps
- Representatives from 9 different Colleges and Universities
- 7 Future Rural Teachers from 4 Colleges
- 23 Higher Education Faculty Members and Administrators
- 18 Public School Teachers, Administrators and Board Members
- 15 Leaders and Advocates representing 9 different Rural Organizations or Foundations.

**Monday Morning:** The morning session on Day 1 began with participants getting to know each other and better understanding of the current reality of everyone's situation. Using a world café format, participants rotated tables, answering three important questions.

**Questions #1:** What are you noticing about the recruitment, placement, and retention of outstanding rural teacher-leaders?

- Teacher pay is a major issue; but money is not the *only* answer.
- A shortage of qualified teacher candidates exists. This is especially true of teacher-leaders. A national trend involving the movement of young people to urban areas plays a major role in this shortage.
- The relationship between the teacher and the community matters. Communities need to do a better of marketing their assets. And
- Retaining teacher leaders is often difficult. Teachers who develop a relationship with the community are much more likely to stay.
- There is a need to look at alternative forms of attracting and developing rural teacher leaders. Schools can be "talent development centers." And opportunities exist with alternative forms of certification.



**Question #2:** What are the roles & characteristics of outstanding teacher-leaders?

- Active in the community and activity with school events.
- Are mentored and become mentors; this might include both inside and outside the school.
- Possess passion for people and are dedicated to their work.
- Innovative. They see things outside the box and possess interpersonal (soft) skills that enable them to lead.
- Build relationships with students, parents, and community members.

**Question #3: What attitudes & beliefs might be getting in the way of attracting and placing teacher-leaders in rural communities?**

- The belief that bigger is better. Some teachers believe that to be perceived as a successful teacher, they need to be in larger place.
- Lack of inclusion. Rural communities and schools may not be open to newcomers who look, think, and behave differently.
- Teaching in a small town will make it difficult to find a spouse.
- Small communities lack social opportunities.

(continue to next page)

Monday Afternoon & Tuesday Morning: After hearing from current rural teachers, who offered their perspectives on teaching in rural communities and two current examples of Rural Teacher Corps Projects, conversations turned to “what can be.” As a result, several “priorities” were identified.

## **I. How We Work Together to Bolster the Recruitment of Future Rural Teacher-Leaders**

*Priority A: Develop a Network of Positive Role Models to Encourage People to become Rural Teachers*

- “Equip teachers to promote teaching as a noble profession.”
- “Teachers need to become their most important “spokespeople.”
- Teachers need to think of their work with students as an act of “apprenticeship.”

*Priority B: Reframe the rural narrative; emphasize the positive aspects of the rural experience.*

- Find avenues to explore and share local wisdom
- “We need to learn to tell the stories of place better.”
- Use place-based learning to immerse students in the local community context.

*Priority C: Focus on efforts that “recruit” students during their actual K-12 school years.*

- “Grow you own”
- “Recruit future rural teachers with the same vigor that we recruit college athletes!”
- “All hands on deck!”

- Implement middle school and high school “student teaching” efforts.

*Priority D: Develop efforts to recruit mid-career professionals who may be tied to a given community.*

- Actively seek to develop innovative efforts with rural colleges and universities.
- “Identify non-certified staff as future teacher candidates; create a path to education.”

*Priority E: Seek opportunities to develop program that include scholarship incentives for teachers to commit to a rural teaching placement.*

- This should include graduate levels of education with a focus on school-community leadership
- Ozarks Teacher Corps, Chico States’ RTR, and UWA’s Black Belt Teacher Corps
- This must include engaging community foundations and other philanthropists in collaborative planning.

*Priority F: Speak to the community and public roles of educators—a more mission-driven dialogue.*

## Teacher Panel & Rural Teacher Corps Talks

As a way of helping everyone understand what might be possible, participants also heard from a panel of current rural teachers and two organizations that have developed rural teacher corps programs.

### Teacher Panel:

- Amy Ginnings - Morrisville, MO
- Mitch Dykstra – Waverly, SD
- Trish Lasley – Alexandria, SD
- Sharon Huggins – Middletown, CA

### Rural Teacher Corps programs

- Ozark Teacher Corps
- Chico State University

## **II. How We Work Together to Enhance the Preservation of Future Rural Teacher-Leaders**

*Priority A: More intensive and real life experiences in rural schools*

- Paid internships
- Residential internship (Chico State's Rural Teacher Residency program)
- A greater emphasis on practicum experiences in rural settings
- There should be greater efforts to match future teachers with current rural teacher
- Early and sustained experiences with outstanding rural teachers
- "Rural immersion."

*Priority B: Rural teacher preparation programs need to be more "futuristic."*

- A stronger emphasis on the interacting with the community through Twitter, Facebook, websites and other social media.
- Recognizing "generational shifts" and taking advantage of the Millennials' penchant for community building and engagement.

*Priority C: Build a stronger focus on the teacher as a respected professional*

- Utilize cohorts is a way to build mission, purpose, and camaraderie
- Consider a keener emphasis on social entrepreneurship
- Focus on "larger" community issues such economic vitality, agriculture, social justice and the environment

*Priority D: Preparation should include a stronger emphasis on being a community member.*

- Preservice experiences should include community studies, research, and service learning.
- "Training to develop deep cultural understanding and communication pathways."

### III. How We Work Together on Placement and Retention Issues

*Priority A: Communities must convey to new teachers that they are a valued part of the overall community.*

- Develop local “ambassadors” to engage in the hiring process.
- Community efforts could involve individuals/groups who engage “rural teachers so they know how valuable they are to schools and community.”
- “Treat teachers like ‘Guests of Honor’ when they show up in our rural communities.”



*Priority B: There must be intentional efforts to connect new teachers to the social fabric of a given community.*

- Connect all new community members to one another
- Communities must nurture the concept of “hosting.”
- These efforts should be include local Chambers of Commerce and economic development efforts.
- Housing issues must be addressed in a proactive manner.

*Priority C: Mentorship programs that pair new teachers with true teacher-leaders.*

- These programs should be structured and intentional
- Efforts should interact with other facets of the community.



*Priority D: Explore collaborating with community foundations and private foundations to provide incentives for new rural teachers to move into graduate education.*

- Regional collaborations may prove valuable to this kind of effort.
- We need to understand the importance of consistent and long-term leadership and its importance to school and community.

*Priority E: External evaluations on why teachers leave rural settings.*

- It is important to remember that placement and retention may be distinctly different issues with their own respective sets of questions.
- Understanding the nuances of teacher experiences is an extremely appropriate academic research topic.



Rural Teacher Corps Project:  
Stakeholder Dialogue

Dakota Wesleyan University  
Mitchell, South Dakota  
June 13-14, 2016.



Rural Schools Collaborative  
PO Box 154  
Cambridge, WI 53523  
[info@ruralschoolscollaborative.org](mailto:info@ruralschoolscollaborative.org)

Dakota Wesleyan University  
1200 W. University  
Mitchell, SD, 57301