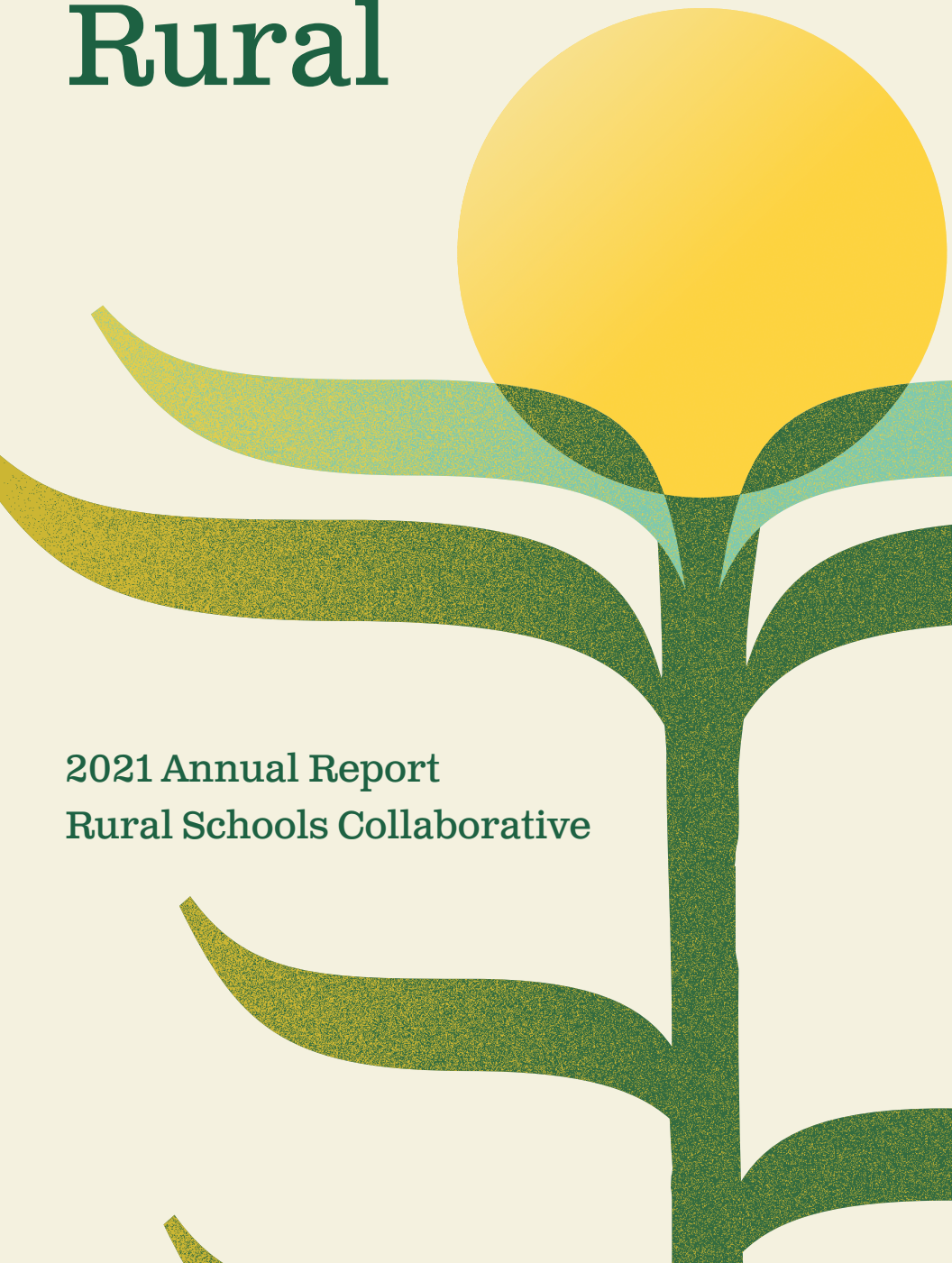


Propagating Rural

2021 Annual Report
Rural Schools Collaborative





Our Roots

A Message from Our Board Chair

We are pleased to present the Rural Schools Collaborative's 2021 annual report, celebrating our continued growth and momentum.

RSC was founded in 2015 by a group of dedicated volunteers, and has since flourished into a small-but-mighty team that pursues our mission daily: to strengthen the bonds between rural schools and communities.

We know a sustainable American future depends on a thriving rural landscape, which is why RSC remains committed to:

- Developing Teacher Leaders
- Place-based Education
- Rural Philanthropy

Through our Regional Hub Partners, individual donors, and ongoing support from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we made great strides; You'll find each of these key areas celebrated throughout this report.

I want to thank everyone who has been a part of RSC's journey this year - we couldn't have done it without you.



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Board Chair
Galesburg, IL

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Thanks to our Regional Hub contacts:

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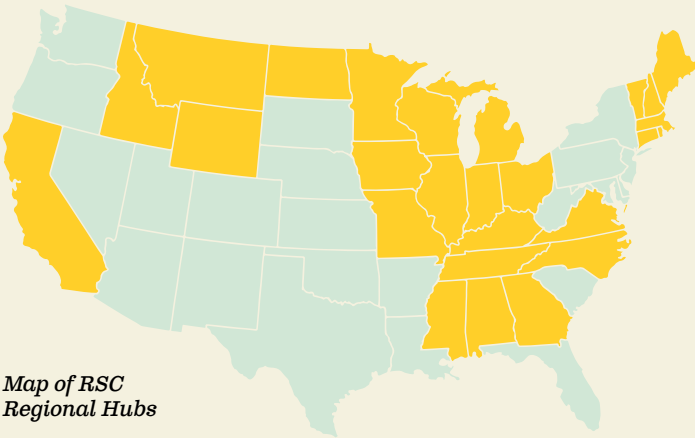
Missouri Ozarks
Holly Beadle

**Read more about RSC's 11 Regional Hubs on our website
at ruralschoolscollaborative.org/regional-hubs**

Our Sturdy Stem

Regional Hub Partners

Rural Schools Collaborative is truly a collaborative, and our 11 regional hubs are the backbone of our organization. In 2021, we celebrated the addition of an Iowa regional hub, anchored in the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, and a Driftless Region hub in Wisconsin and Minnesota, anchored in the University of Wisconsin - Platteville.



*Map of RSC
Regional Hubs*



Hub Spotlight: Driftless Region

Noted as the land untouched by glaciers, the Driftless Region is a geological treasure with idyllic rolling hills and gentle valleys. It was in this unique setting that the School of Education at UW-Platteville was chartered in 1866 as the state's very first school for teacher preparation.

Training teachers to be prepared for a rural school is the primary focus for UW-Platteville's new Kindergarten-through-9th grade licensure program. With a particular emphasis on place-based practices, professional flexibility, equity and inclusivity, and social justice, Dr. Jennifer Collins sees great opportunities for this program to critically engage students on the realities of living and teaching in a rural area:

“We're getting students to look at their place with a critical eye and to see not only whose voices are being shared, but whose are being left out. So, from your first Introduction to Education class, you'll begin to talk about and think about rural areas.”

We commend UW-Platteville School of Education on their rural-centric efforts to combat the teacher shortage!



“I love to collaborate. I think that comes from being from a small town—we're independent people, but we lean on each other and we depend on each other.”

– Dr. Jennifer Collins, Director of UW-Platteville's School of Education



Hub Spotlight: Iowa

Strong schools are essential to strong rural communities, which is why the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque (CFGD) focuses on issues of student achievement. As RSC's new Iowa hub, the Community Foundation's goal is to support thriving rural communities through a focus on one of the systems that has the biggest impact on small-town quality of life: education. The foundation will enhance the vitality of rural education by bridging local generosity, ingenuity and leadership with efforts like teacher training and place-based education.

With affiliate foundations across the seven-county Dubuque region, the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque has a long history of building trusting relationships with leaders in rural communities to chart clear paths forward, addressing complex social challenges from academic achievement to economic opportunity.

CFGD has a track record of both mobilizing local generosity and securing funds from national organizations to deliver region-wide transformational change, and RSC is honored to have them serve as the anchor for the newly-established Iowa hub.



“Our organizations share a vision of inclusive, collaborative and supported rural communities. Our aligned values and shared work will only deepen our commitment to regional education and philanthropy.”

- Nancy Van Milligen, CFGD President and CEO



Our Growing Branches

*RSC's Catalyst Initiative yields
four new Rural Teacher Corps*

A sustainable American future depends on a thriving rural landscape, with education as the crux. There is no panacea for alleviating the rural teacher shortage, but the rural teacher corps concept - an intentional effort to produce rural teacher-leaders - squarely tackles these issues.



“The search for highly effective teachers is an ongoing quest for small, rural school districts across the nation. It is one of the greatest challenges facing rural district superintendents and their boards of education.”

– Dr. Allen Pratt, Executive Director of the National Rural Education Association

Rural teacher corps efforts have been adopted by a growing number of institutions including several shining examples in RSC Hubs:

- **The Monmouth College TARTANS** (Teachers Allied with Rural Towns and Neighborhood Schools) Program in Monmouth, IL
- **The Ozarks Teacher Corps**, funded by the Community Foundation of the Ozarks in Springfield, MO
- **The University of West Alabama’s Black Belt Teacher Corps**, based out of Livingston, AL
- **The Eastern Illinois University Rural Teacher Corps**, from Charleston, IL

This year, RSC was able to expand rural teacher corps efforts to four new programs. Each participant received a \$25,000 planning grant from RSC’s Catalyst Initiative, made possible by an anonymous donor. We are proud to announce the 2021 cohort included the following outstanding universities, all of which are connected to RSC Regional Hubs:

- **Morehead State University** (Appalachian Hub)
- **University of Wisconsin-Platteville** (Driftless Region Hub)
- **University of North Dakota** (North Dakota Hub)
- **University of Wyoming** (Northern Rockies Hub)

Congratulations to these four universities for their exemplary dedication to preparing rural teachers!

The Catalyst Grant Initiative is supported by RSC’s Catalyst Fund, a philanthropic venture effort that has provided more than \$200,000 in planning and development support since 2016. This year’s program was made possible by a generous anonymous donation.



Black Belt Teacher Corps at The University of West Alabama, Livingston, AL



Catalyst Grant Recipient University of Wisconsin-Platteville

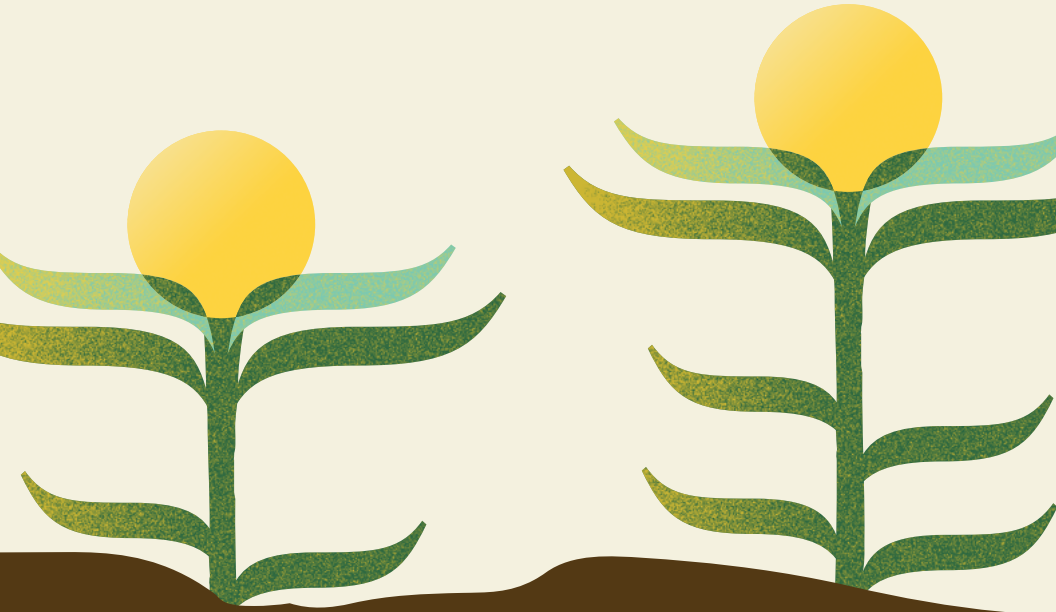
Our Sprouts

The I Am A Rural Teacher Campaign

Rural Schools Collaborative, in partnership with the National Rural Education Association and the Community Foundation for the Ozarks, are proud to continue to grow the I Am A Rural Teacher Project with continued support from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



BILL & MELINDA
GATES *foundation*



Rural Schools Collaborative and the National Rural Education Association are pleased to continue to grow the I Am A Rural Teacher Campaign to elevate teacher voice. This year, we:

- Launched the **Teach Rural Job Board** on the I Am A Rural Teacher website. This free, interactive job board spotlights rural regions and schools with option positions.
- Hosted a successful rural education forum in Indianapolis. These advocacy efforts will continue into 2022 with Regional Policy Playbook recommendations, and Rural Broadband Coalitions.
- Expanded I Am A Rural Teacher Storytelling: We believe that teacher voices are critical to rural schools, and we continued to celebrate those perspectives through podcasts, social media, and interviews.

We thank The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their support of this innovative and collaborative effort to strengthen rural schools.

I Am A Rural Teacher Spotlight: Fredrick Mugalula, Rakai District, Uganda



“For our area to evolve we need to touch the lives of young people here in the village.”

- Fredrick's father, who is also a teacher

As part of RSC's I Am A Rural Teacher Podcast, we visited with Fredrick Mugalula, an elementary teacher from southern Uganda. Fredrick is a founding member of RSC's Rural Educators Across Borders program, a new initiative to facilitate teacher-to-teacher collaboration across the globe.

In this podcast, Frederick shares about the unique opportunities and challenges in the education system in Uganda. For many of his students, choosing between their family's livelihood on the farm or attending school can be difficult. Through place-based education and relationships, Fredrick works to impress the importance of education to each of his students.

We highly encourage you to read or listen to the full story and all of our other podcast features at IAmARuralTeacher.org/podcasts

Nurturing Good Work

The Rural Schools Innovation Grants

RSC works to elevate and reward the good work of teachers and schools. This past year, in light of the outstanding efforts by our rural schools to create and sustain innovative programming for their students, RSC partnered with Compeer Financial and their Fund for Rural America to fund the Rural Schools Innovation Grants program. Through this collaboration, 22 rural schools were awarded funding to advance these vital programs so more students can benefit from outside-the-box thinking.





Compeer Innovation Grant Spotlight: Javier Reyes, Monmouth, IL

Javier Reyes is a dual-language science teacher at Central Intermediate School in Monmouth, Illinois. Although a district of only a couple thousand students, over 16 different languages are actively spoken in the school halls, which poses a distinct challenge in trying to connect families and students with largely English speaking teachers and classroom content.

Javier engaging with his students in the classroom

a groundbreaking curriculum with his multilingual students focused on using technology to connect students with their community and each other. These skills proved invaluable in the new digital environment these past two years, and the district sought Javier's help in facilitating meaningful and engaging e-learning.

Shortly before the pandemic began, Javier and his colleagues spearheaded

This early success inspired Javier and Amy Freitag, the district's Director of Multilingual Learning and Grants, to apply for the Rural Schools Innovation Grants, a new partnership with RSC and Compeer Financial, in hopes of bolstering their efforts into a full-fledged, student-led broadcasting program.

Since receiving the grant, Javier and his students were able to build a designated recording space and purchase state-of-the-art equipment. They even launched a digital magazine celebrating culture, spotlighting academic growth, and advocating for student wellness. Moving forward, Javier hopes to have students conduct live broadcasts and interviews in the school and out in the community.



Students utilizing the new grant-provided broadcasting equipment

This project was made possible through the Rural Schools Innovation Grants program, a new partnership between RSC and Compeer Financial Fund for Rural America. This program awarded the innovative ideas necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The grant honored the hard work of teachers and schools in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota by providing up to \$10,000 to continue their visionary projects. Thanks to Compeer Financial and the Fund for Rural America for their generous support! Read more about all the grant recipient projects on our website.

Our Healthy Garden

*Thank you to all of the donors
who make our work possible.*

\$100,000 and more

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
The Catalyst Fund, MO
Community Foundation of the Ozarks, MO
Galesburg Community Foundation, IL
Gary and Jana Funk, Philadelphia, PA

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In memory of Evelyn Ruckman, by Pat Funk,
Springfield, MO

RSC has a
**Million
Reasons**
to be thankful!

In 2021, RSC reached an important milestone. With the help of good partners, a lot of determination, and a little bit of luck, we surpassed \$1,000,000 in contributions. Thank you to all of our donors and supporters who have contributed to this success - We have a million reasons to be thankful!







“A million dollars in contributions means a sustainable future for

rural teachers, students, and communities.”





Taylor McCabe-Zuhne
Executive Director



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