

National Rural Education Association (NREA) Research Agenda – 2016-2021

10 Research Priorities



Access to counseling/mental health/chemical dependence services



Building capacity to meet the needs of diverse and special populations



Closing student achievement gaps in rural schools



College and career readiness/preparation for postsecondary experiences



Data-driven decision-making to improve student educational attainment



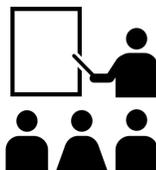
Effects of poverty on rural education



Rural school and community/family relations



Teacher/Leader preparation for rural schools



Teacher/Leader recruitment and retention



Technology integration to meet needs of rural schools



Purpose: As the leading rural education organization in the nation, NREA represents the hard-working rural practitioners and dedicated research community who collectively work to improve the educational opportunities of America's rural students. NREA outlines 10 research priorities for the future of rural education research, identifying the broad areas where further study of student and educator experiences in the rural context are essential for building capacity and advancing rural students' educational attainment. Equity of educational opportunity lies at the heart of our mission as an organization and serves as a guiding principle for our research agenda, as outlined below. In the abstract, these topics are not uncommon nor are they innovative in the field of educational research; rather, further study and investigation of these topics in the rural context is what is groundbreaking. Topics are listed in alphabetical order and are numbered for ease-of-reference. The order does not represent a priority ranking.

	Topics	Examples of sub-topics and areas of focus*	Rural contextual importance
	Access to counseling/mental health/chemical dependence services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffing in schools Training and professional development for school staff Building positive partnerships and relations between schools and community 	Rural areas may be more vulnerable to capacity short-falls than urban and suburban areas, owing largely to the sparsity of clients and the employment of fewer staff and having a smaller pool of resources.
	Building capacity to meet the needs of diverse and special populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students with disabilities/special needs High achievers English learners High-poverty students Response To Intervention (RTI) 	Rural areas may be more vulnerable to capacity short-falls than urban and suburban areas, owing largely to employing fewer staff and having a smaller pool of resources. Yet, rural students' needs should be met in the local schooling context, in spite of such shortfalls.
	Closing student achievement gaps in rural schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School readiness Identifying effective interventions to close achievement gaps Motivation/engagement gaps Opportunity gaps 	Interventions need to be applied in the rural context to ensure their applicability to close gaps for rural students. Education isn't always a "one-size-fits-all" and closing gaps in rural schools may require myriad solutions.
	College and career readiness/preparation for postsecondary experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to AP/IB coursework Dual enrollment College enrollment/persistence patterns School climate Career/educational aspirations of rural youth Access to postsecondary opportunities in rural areas Access to career counseling Current high quality Career & Technical Education (CTE) Programs 	Rural communities have fewer employment and internship opportunities than non-rural, increasing the implications of poor performance and/or poor postsecondary preparedness.
	Data-driven decision-making to improve student educational attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher use of assessment data (formative and summative) to strengthen classroom practice Personalized learning Using data to monitor leading and lagging indicators of student performance at the classroom, school, and district level 	As the nation's educators are just learning to use the enormous amounts of student data recently available to them, we must work together to ensure that rural teachers and leaders effectively use data to improve student achievement-related outcomes.
	Effects of poverty on rural education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social/emotional well-being School readiness Motivation/engagement Nutrition/health issues Cognitive and physical development Student achievement Attendance 	Studies of poverty's influence in the rural context will shed light on how to improve student educational attainment-related outcomes.
	Rural school and community/family relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role of rural schools in community revitalization Parent/family/community engagement in rural schools Community and school sustainability 	The community plays an integral role in many rural areas, such that supports for schooling, or the lack thereof, exert a large influence on students and their approaches to schooling.
	Teacher/Leader preparation for rural schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate placements for practicums Rural focused course content More in-depth teacher and leader preparatory program training on human development and its implications and relations to student learning in schools Use of place-based approaches Recruiting candidates for the profession Empathy Gap (perspective taking) . 	Many rural districts struggle with finding teacher candidates for their openings. Targeted coursework to prepare teachers for working with rural students and communities may help improve retention rates and ease recruitment challenges.
	Teacher/Leader recruitment and retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induction programs Teacher shortages Partnerships and collaboration with higher education Staffing needs – hard-to-staff rural and remote schools Teacher attitude (self-efficacy, well-being) Professional development 	High teacher and administrative turnover presents a unique challenge for rural districts in that the recruitment pool is much smaller and the local labor force is more limited. Urban and suburban areas have more resources to attract new teachers and administrators.
	Technology integration to meet needs of rural schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to technology Use of technology to improve teacher professional development opportunities Blended learning Barriers to technology integration Use of technology to increase courses available to students 	Rural areas have been slow to benefit-in-full from the technological advancements and many lack access to sufficient bandwidth to support whole-school online access simultaneously. Technology offers promise, but cannot be assumed as a solution for all rural schools in the short-term.

*Sub-topics are illustrative only and not intended to be exhaustive.