Executive Director Comments

On Monday and Tuesday this week I participated in the Rural Practitioners Gathering at the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative in Hazard Kentucky. Practitioners from eastern Kentucky and selected other from around the nation met to identify challenges to rural education and begin the process of developing strategies to address those challenges. Four issues percolated to the top of our discussions: changing low aspirations to mindsets of abundance; preparation of rural educators; connecting students and teachers; and moving from mandates to innovation. Two observations of the meeting: the challenges of rural education around the country are similar from community to community and the participants were inspired to provide a 1st class education for the students they serve. These conversations will continue. You can observe the process by joining a social network called the Holler. The link is www.theholler.org We were provided the opportunity to participate in screening of a new educational documentary, “Most Likely to Succeed”. The film was an award winner at the Sundance film festival. It is well done and causes on to think seriously about how we can reimagine education for children so they are better prepared for the future. Learn more about the film HERE. Congratulations to Jeff Hawkins and David Barnett for organizing and planning this experience!

The NREA Foundation Essay and Video Essay contests have been announced:

Grades 3-5
1st Place
Heather Hough - Grade 5
Gordon ISD
112 Rusk St.
Gordon, TX 76453
Teacher: Wendy Wellborn
Admin: Holly Campbell

Runner Up
Natalie Blevins - Grade 5
Bradie Shrum Elementary School
1101 North Shelby St.
Salem, Indiana 47167
Teacher: Beverly Sweeney
Admin: Brent Minton

Grades 6-8

1st Place
Natalie Staib - Grade 8
Anderson Middle School
135 Mustang Dr.
Anderson, MO 64831
Teacher: Cathy Keith
Admin: Ken Anders

Runner Up
Darrian McGhee - Grade 8
Fowler Junior High School
600 West Grant
Fowler, CO 81039
Teacher: Rebecca Zartman
Admin: Russell Bates

Video Essay Winner
Ashtyn McDonald - Grade 9
Walsh High School
Box 68
Walsh, CO 81090
Teacher: Denise Jones
Admin: Kyle Hebberd

The research committee has selected the winner of the Chance Dissertation Award. John Ulferts has been selected as the winner. His dissertation, “A Brief Summary of An Evaluation of Staff Recruitment and Retention in the Smallest Illinois Schools: What are the Implications?” John will
be sharing his results in a breakout session at the 107th NREA Conference and Research Symposium. The Chance winner receives a $500 honorarium.

**NREA members are invited to become active in organization affairs. One way is to run for an office.** The open offices this year are: President-elect, State Education Agency Representative, Higher Education Representative, and Teacher. Candidates must be a member in good standing to run for office. If you are interested, please send your intentions to jehill@purdue.edu

A draft of the program for the 107th is located on the home page of the website; [www.nrea.net](http://www.nrea.net) Look under the latest news for the link.

I encourage you to register and reserve your rooms for the conference. You can register here. Special room rates are available here until September 17.

**In the near future, you will receive a link to participate in a survey from the NREA Research Committee.** This is part of the process of developing a Rural Education Research Agenda. Please take the time to complete the survey. Your voice in this endeavor is needed and greatly appreciated.

**Report from Washington (Joel Packer, CEF)**

1. **Ending Sequestration Creates Jobs!** In response to a request from Senator Sanders, the ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, CBO projected that completely ending the sequester spending reductions would result in 800,000 jobs being created over the next two years. It would “increase full-time-equivalent employment by 0.5 million” in calendar year 2016 and would “increase full-time-equivalent employment by 0.3 million” in calendar year 2017. Also see: [Sanders Statement on Job Losses Caused by Sequestration](https://www.sanders.senate.gov/news/statement-on-job-losses-caused-by-sequestration)

2. **FY 2016 Appropriations:** No new news. However, based on data in this recent article in *Politico* -

3. **Last Call to Sign NDD letter:** The DEADLINE TO SIGN ON IS AUGUST 21! We have almost 1,400 national, state and local organizations and entities signed on (see attached for latest unedited list of signers). Our goal is to get to at least 2,000 signers. If you have not yet signed on please do so. Please share this with your state and local chapters/affiliates and other coalitions and organizations you work with.

   This sign-on letter is for national, state, and local signatures
ONLY. Individual citizens CANNOT participate and WILL NOT be listed.

When adding your organization’s name, please write it EXACTLY HOW YOU WOULD LIKE IT TO BE LISTED ON THE LETTER. Please double check your spelling before you submit your form. Note that if your organization’s name begins with the word “The,” it will be listed with the other organizations that begin with the letter “t.”

Please confirm that you are in fact authorized to sign on for your organization by checking the appropriate box on the form. Only organizations with authorized individuals completing the form will be listed on the letter. We have added a section of the sign on form that asks you to identify the nondefense sector with which your organization most closely identifies. While your organization may identify with more than one, please choose the one that is MOST applicable. This question is meant for administrative use and will not appear on the letter sent to Congress.

Due to the large number of signatures, we WILL NOT accept edits. Organizations must sign on to the letter “as is.”

To sign on, complete this form. We aim to get this letter to the Hill in September.

4. **Student Loans**: National Journal prepared a brief [Student Loan Reform Primer](#).

5. **Teacher Shortages**: The New York Times recently ran this piece: [Teacher Shortages Spur a Nationwide Hiring Scramble (Credentials Optional)](#).

“In a stark about-face from just a few years ago, school districts have gone from handing out pink slips to scrambling to hire teachers.

“Across the country, districts are struggling with shortages of teachers, particularly in math, science and special education — a result of the layoffs of the recession years combined with an improving economy in which fewer people are training to be teachers.”