



---

# ADVANCING RURAL EDUCATION

---

Dr. Melissa Sadorf

Executive Director

---



---

# ADVANCING RURAL EDUCATION

---

Dr. Melissa Sadorf

Executive Director

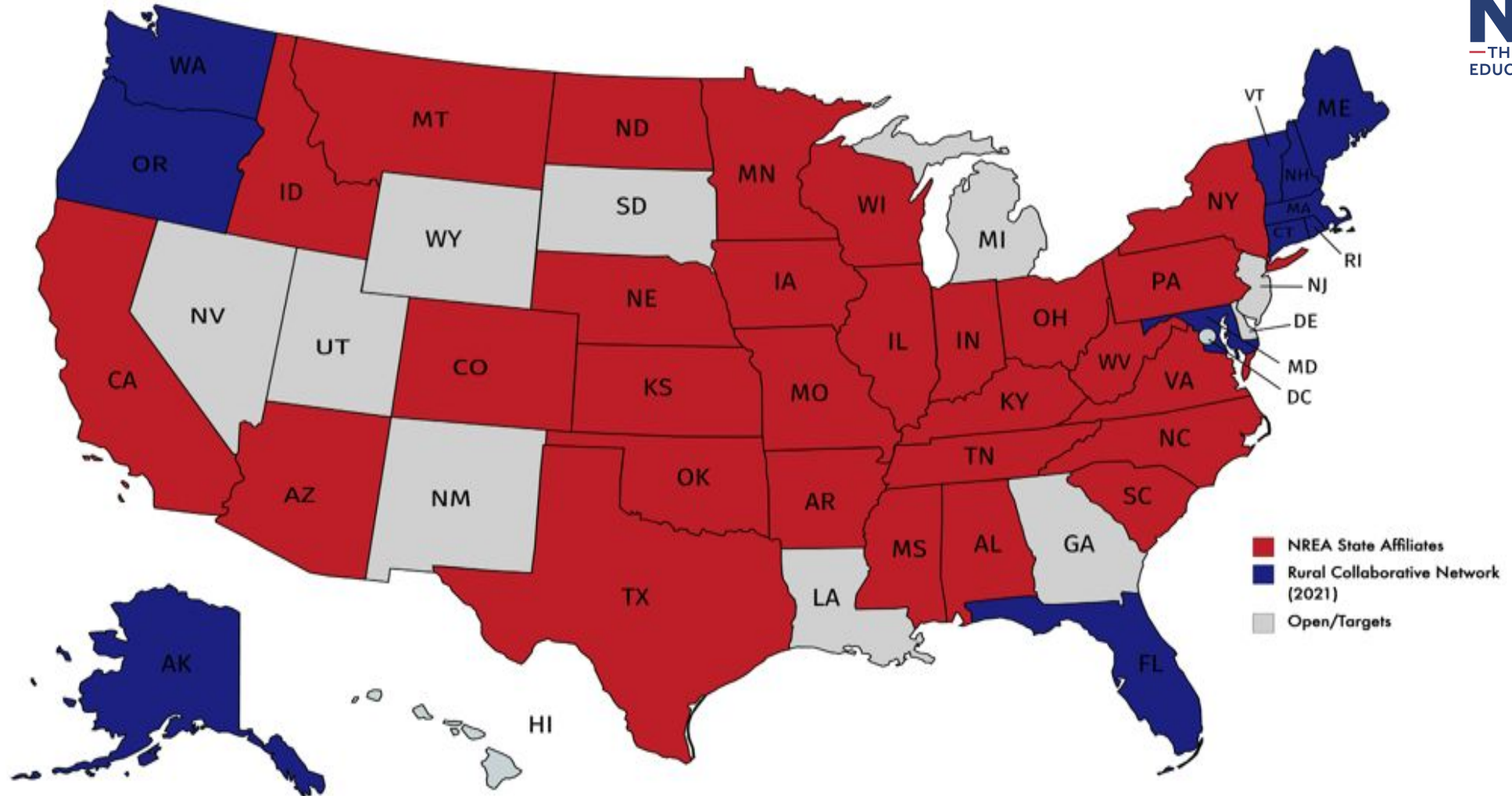
---



1. **Advocacy with Integrity** – Giving rural schools a national voice grounded in lived experience.
2. **Research that Informs Practice** – Turning data into action that strengthens classrooms.
3. **Leadership that Builds Community** – Connecting educators and researchers to elevate local voices.
4. **Partnerships that Expand Possibility** – Collaborating across sectors to bring resources to rural places.
5. **Celebration of the Rural Advantage** – Reframing rural not as less, but as the model of resilience and innovation.

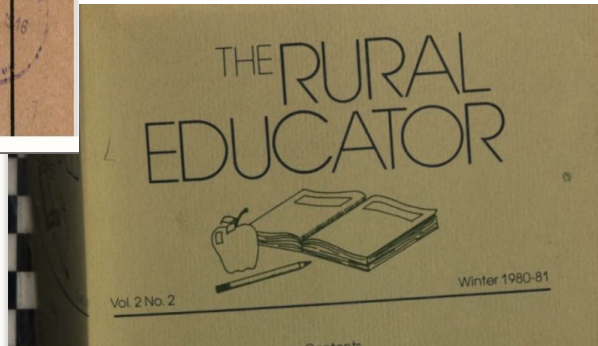
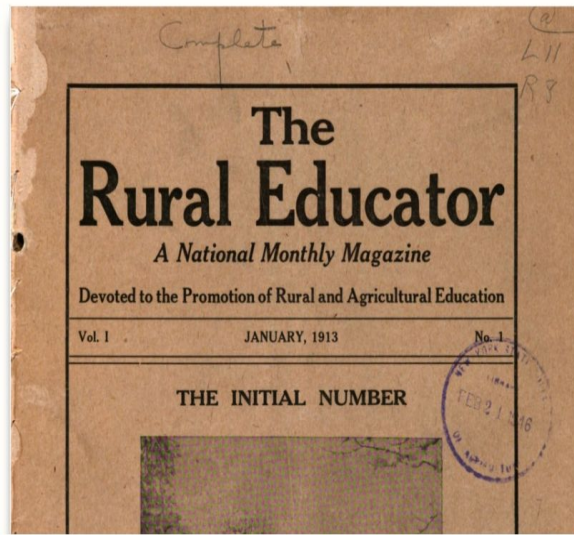
*“Rural isn’t less—it’s different. And in that difference lies our advantage.”*







# HathiTrust



Early issues of *The Country Teacher* and *The Rural Educator* dating back to 1913 can be found online at The Hathi Trust's online digital archive (NREA Collection at [hathitrust.org](https://hathitrust.org))

Focus: Agricultural ed and homemaking (how to raise chickens in your school yard, teaching canning), running small and one room schools, rural curriculum (history, spelling, grammar)

# *The Rural Educator*

## *Official Journal of NREA*

Published regularly since the  
1980's

Open source, freely available at  
[ruraleducator.info](http://ruraleducator.info)

*Annual special issues:*  
**2023: Rural Indigenous Education**

**2024: Multilingual Rural Education**

**2025: Care in the Rural Classroom**



[Scholars Junction Home](#) [About](#) [FAQ](#) [My Account](#)

The Rural Educator is Hosted by Mississippi State University Scholars Junction.

[Journal Home](#)  
[About This Journal](#)  
[Editorial Board](#)  
[Policies and Guidelines for Authors](#)  
[Ethics Statement](#)  
[Thanks to the 2023 Reviewers](#)

[Submit Article](#)  
[Most Popular Papers](#)  
[Receive Email Notices or RSS](#)

#### SPECIAL ISSUES:

[Joint Special Issue Between The Rural Educator and Journal of American Indian Education](#)  
[Race and Rurality in Education](#)

Select an issue:  
[All Issues](#) [Browse](#)

Search  
Enter search terms:  
 [Search](#)  
[in this journal](#)

[Advanced Search](#)

ISSN: 2643-9662

#### COMMUNITY LINKS

[Australian and International Journal of Rural Education](#)  
[Journal of Research in Rural Education](#)  
[Theory and Practice in Rural Education](#)

[Home](#) > [The Rural Educator](#)

[Follow](#)

As the official journal of the National Rural Education Association, The Rural Educator serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas among the rural education community. The journal aims to provide a greater understanding of the strengths and needs of rural education and to provide rural educators with resources that support their work.

See the [About Page](#) for complete coverage of the journal.

Contact the editors [here](#)

#### Be a Reviewer

The Rural Educator relies on reviewers to provide editors with guidance and authors with feedback.

[Use this form](#) to indicate your interest in reviewing for the journal and areas of expertise.

#### Follow the journal on social media

[Twitter @EducatorRural](#)

[Facebook](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

Current Issue: Volume 45, Number 3  
(2024)

#### Research Articles

[PDF](#) Rhetoric or Change? The Role of State Policies and Conditions in Shaping Postsecondary Education Access and Success for Rural Students  
*Darris R. Means, Jenay F. E. Willis, Kim Getfield, Devon Golden, Bryson Henriott, Brandon Lee, Alejandra Medina, Hannah Reitley, Lily K. Tunstall, and Ying Zhou*

[PDF](#) Exploring How Rural Schools and Communities Influence the Academic Journeys of College Students in STEM Majors





**Research Articles** are reports of empirical research that address problems of practice in rural education.



**Promising Practice Articles** provide in-depth descriptions of educational practices that have shown promise to support teaching and learning in rural education.

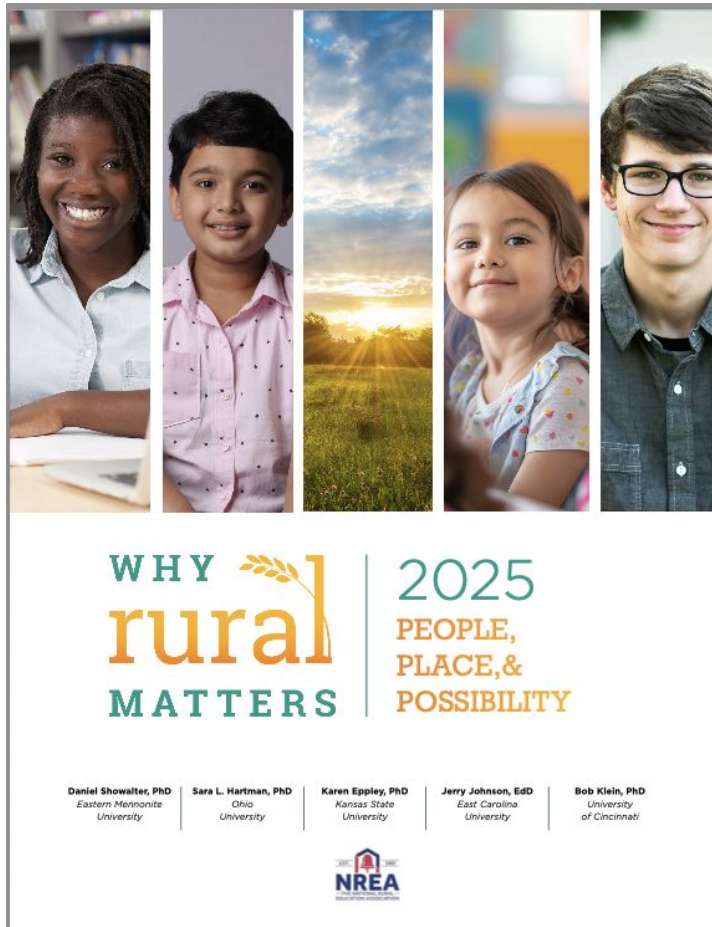


**Reviews of Research** synthesize the knowledge base around issues related to the NREA Research Agenda



**Policy Briefs** summarize key state and federal rural education policy issues for educators and advocates

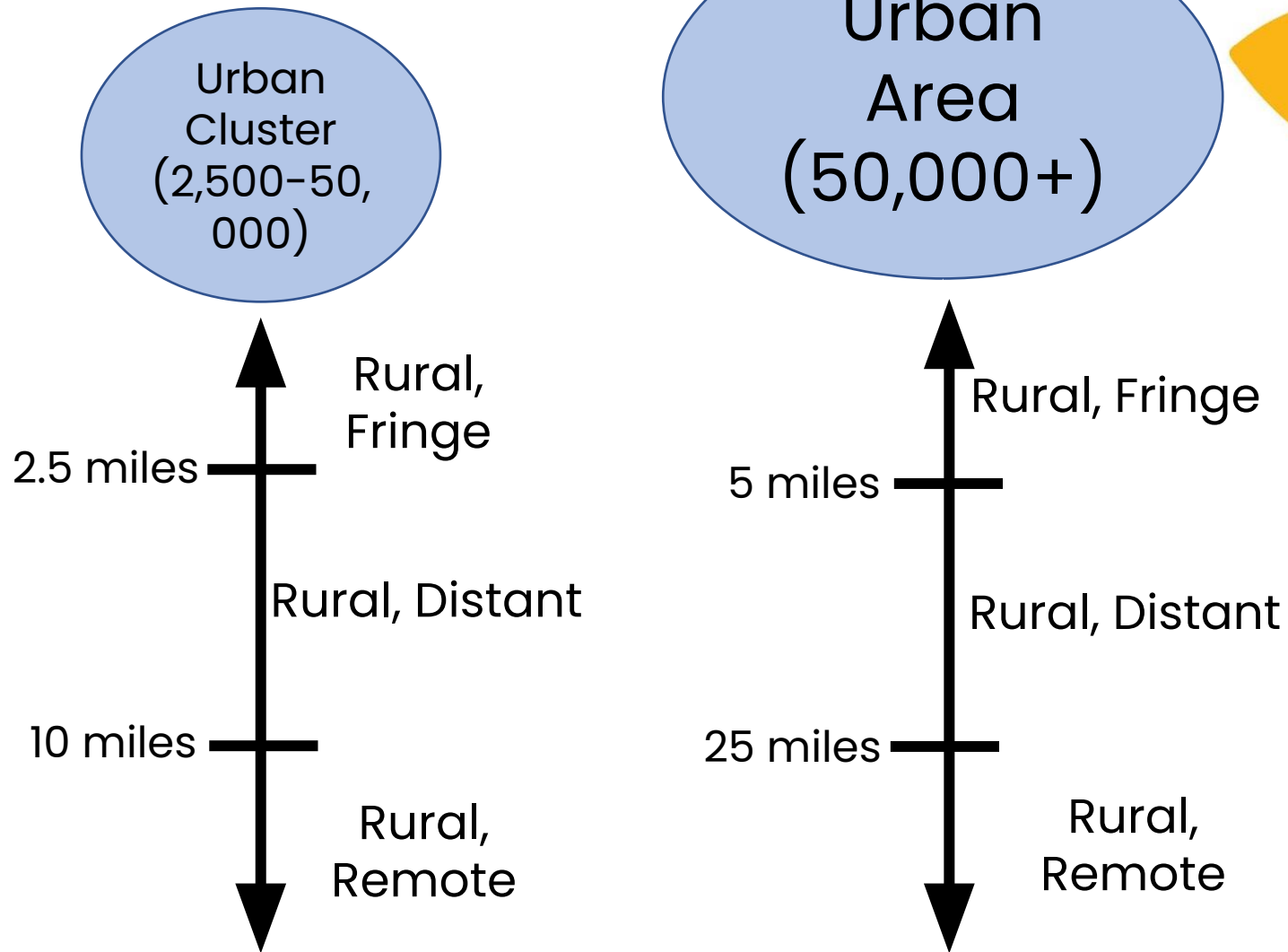




# Why Rural Matters 2025:

## An Overview with Implications for Iowa

# What Is *Rural*?\*



\* Per NCES Urban-Centric Locale definitions. Note: these definitions have changed, and new designations will apply the revised definitions to the most recent (2020) decennial Census data. You will find these in the Report.

# People, Places, & Possibility - The Landscape of Rural Education

**9.7 million** students attend rural schools — more than the **100 largest U.S. districts combined**.

**7.8 million** students attend rural districts — that's **1 in 6** of all public school students.

**1 in 7** rural students lives in poverty.

**1 in 15** rural students lacks health insurance.

**1 in 10** rural students does not graduate from high school.

**1 in 13** rural students changed residences within the last year.

# 5 Gauges, 25 Indicators - Where Rural Matters Most

**Rural Education Footprint:** Over **50% of all districts** are rural; many serve small, remote populations with limited economies of scale.

**Student & Family Characteristics:** Poverty, mobility, and multilingual growth remain defining features of rural life.

**Educational Policy Context:** Rural per-pupil spending (~\$8,400) and teacher salaries trail national averages; transportation costs are disproportionately high.

**Educational Outcomes:** Rural achievement held relatively steady post-pandemic, but **Grade 8 math** and **reading performance** dipped in many states.

**Access to Supports for Well-Being:** Students per counselor average **335:1**; healthcare and mental health access gaps persist across regions.

# Iowa's Rural Landscape: Scale, Strength, and Shifts

- Over half of Iowa's schools and about a third of students are in rural settings
- Rural schools show strong outcomes in graduation and early learning
- Ongoing challenges include workforce, transportation, and student well-being
- Why Rural Matters 2025 will spotlight Iowa's balance of stability and innovation

# Translating the Trends: What Matters Most for Iowa

## Strengths:

- ✓ Deep community investment in local schools.
- ✓ Strong early childhood participation and graduation rates.
- ✓ Balanced fiscal management and collaborative leadership networks.

## Challenges:

- ⚠ Recruiting and retaining teachers and mental-health professionals.
- ⚠ Managing transportation and operational costs across large geographic areas.
- ⚠ Supporting middle-grade learning recovery and access to enrichment opportunities.

# How the Why Rural Matters Report Supports Iowa's Advocacy Priorities

Theme	WRM 2025 Focus (National)	Iowa Advocacy Focus
Teacher & Leader Workforce	Recruitment challenges, retention, and leadership pipeline gaps nationwide	Grow-your-own teacher programs and flexible pathways for retention
Educational Access & Equity	Disparities in funding, broadband, and transportation access across rural states	Operational sharing incentives and per-pupil formula fairness initiatives
Whole-Child Well-Being	Limited mental health and counseling access; emphasis on student well-being	Expanding AEA capacity and rural mental health practitioner pipelines
Early Learning & Readiness	Wide variability in preschool enrollment and early learning infrastructure	Strong state-supported preschool access and continued early learning investment
Community Partnerships	Collaboration as a driver of innovation and sustainability in rural schools	Local governance, community engagement, and advocacy collaboration

# Leveraging the WRM Report for Action

## 1. Use the data to strengthen your message.

Frame legislative conversations with the national narrative: Iowa is part of a larger rural movement.

## 2. Connect Iowa's successes to national benchmarks.

Show how early learning and community-driven leadership make Iowa a model for rural innovation.

## 3. Highlight areas where Iowa leads.

When the report launches, use it to demonstrate where the state's rural systems outperform others—particularly in early learning and community cohesion.

## 4. Use the gaps to advocate for what's next.

Workforce and mental health access remain national pain points—align Iowa's asks with those themes to attract broader support.

## 5. Stay ready to amplify.

When Why Rural Matters 2025 is released, state leaders can issue statements or op-eds connecting the data to Iowa's story, reinforcing that “rural education is Iowa education.”

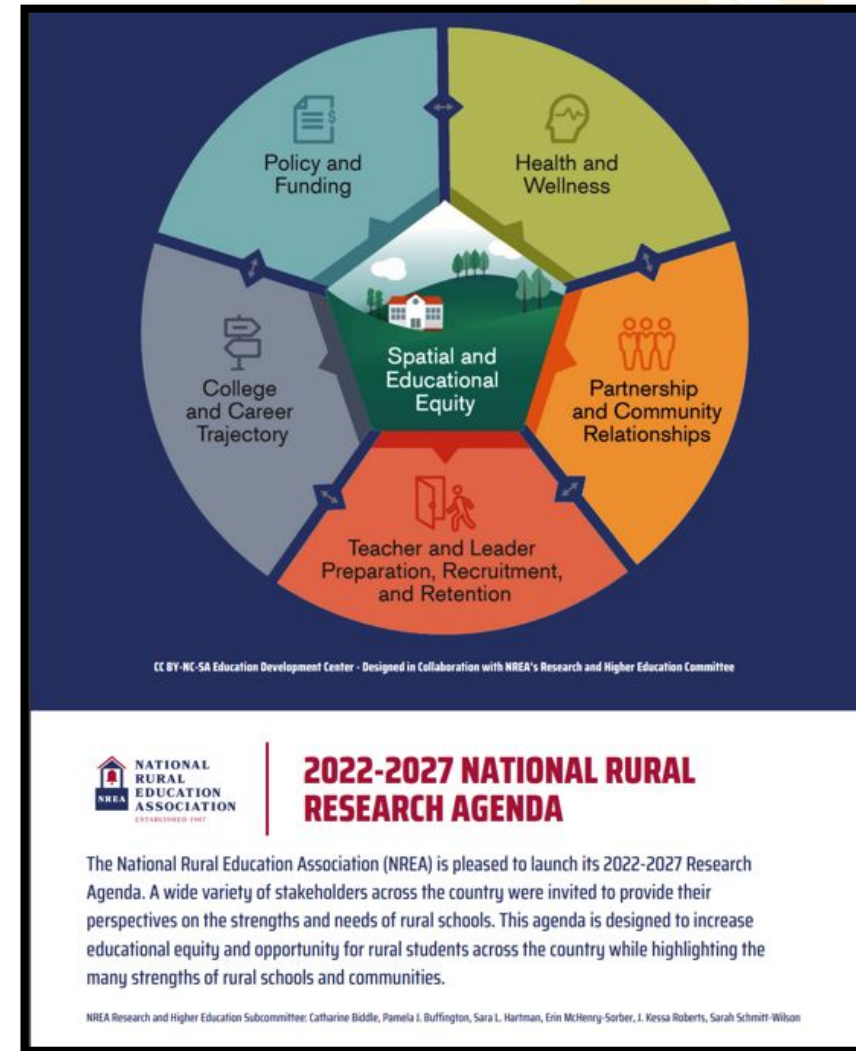
# Alignment of WRM with NREA's Rural Research Agenda

Spatial equity is how access is linked to place.

It refers to:

- how resources are allocated
- how services are distributed
- access to educational opportunities

Often funding systems and policies contribute to spatial inequities.





Daniel Showalter, PhD  
Eastern Mennonite  
University

Sara L. Hartman, PhD  
Ohio  
University

Karen Eppley, PhD  
Kansas State  
University

Jerry Johnson, EdD  
East Carolina  
University

Bob Klein, PhD  
University  
of Cincinnati



WHY  
rural  
MATTERS

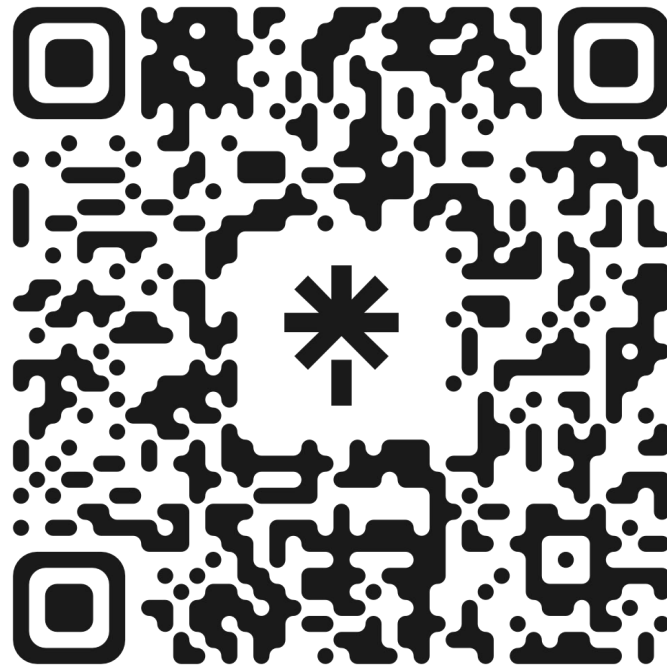
# Learn More After the Launch on October 12!

Report, Data Dashboard,  
Communications Toolkit:

<https://www.nrea.net/why-rural-matters>



**October 13-15, 2025 • Salt Lake City, Utah**



Dr. Melissa Sadorf  
NREA Executive Director

