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## MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues,

As we enter into a new year, the REL Appalachia (REL AP) team is pleased to continue sharing updates on work accomplished in 2017 and excited about our plans for upcoming activities. In collaboration with our partners, REL AP staff is pursuing projects in four major content areas: early literacy, mathematics, college and career readiness, and data use. Within these areas we have completed or are in the midst of a number of activities – all aimed at fostering the use of evidence to improve students' educational outcomes.



In addition to our newsletter, we invite you to check out the latest events and news from REL AP and learn more about our partnerships and work in the region, on our newly updated website at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/appalachia/index.asp>. Need more ways to keep in touch? Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [subscribe](#) to this newsletter. In addition, if you'd like to learn more about our work or make a request for assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us at [relappalachia@sri.com](mailto:relappalachia@sri.com). We are honored to continue to serve the needs of this diverse region and beyond for years to come.

Deborah Jonas, PhD  
Director, REL Appalachia

## PROJECT UPDATES

### Learn About Our Work and Partnership Events

REL Appalachia works in partnership with school districts, state departments of education, and other education stakeholders in the region to develop high-quality research and to use and disseminate the research findings to improve student outcomes. These partnerships combine rigorous research with responsive training, coaching, and technical support and practitioner-focused information sharing to ensure that evidence informs practice in a timely manner to benefit students.

## Learning from each other: REL Appalachia's Governing Board Meeting



Karen Dodd, chief performance officer for the commissioner of education, and REL AP board member, presenting at 2nd Governing Board meeting.

Professors, program directors, state education department staff, and long-time education professionals from across the Appalachian region met for our second REL AP Governing Board meeting in Frankfort, Kentucky on October 17. Kentucky Commissioner of Education Stephen Pruitt opened the meeting with a motivational address stressing the importance of cross-state collaboration and how convenings, like those of the Governing Board, offer a space for different state stakeholders to connect, learn from each other, and ultimately improve the future for students. Learning from each other was the resonating theme of this Governing Board meeting. During the daylong meeting members had the opportunity to discuss the needs of the region, hear REL AP project updates, and learn about new and exciting work from the staff of the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics. We are eager to continue our work with such a dedicated

and knowledgeable Governing Board! Read more about the meeting in our recent [blog post](#).

## Mining for skills: Connecting Rural Students with Programs that Facilitate Career Success



Educators at Southwest Virginia Community College collaborate during bridge event activity.

On October 24, the Virginia Improving Postsecondary Transitions partnership hosted a bridge event at three community colleges in southwest Virginia. Secondary and postsecondary educators, counselors, administrators, and other professionals who support students on their pathways to college and careers joined REL AP staff at Mountain Empire, Southwest Virginia, and Wytheville Community Colleges. Over the course of the day, participants engaged in rich discussions about their advising approaches and explored tools like the academic and career plans developed by staff at the Virginia Department of Education. The workshop was a

great success; on a feedback survey administered at the end of the meeting, 100 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they expected to apply or share information from the workshop. Read more about the bridge event in our recent [blog post](#).

## Kentucky Rural College Readiness partnership

Members of the [Rural College Readiness partnership](#) came together on October 19 to begin building a logic model to guide their work. Partners from Clay County, Jackson County, and Owsley County participated in the activities with high energy, fostering conversations and the generation of ideas to include in their partnership model. REL AP staff were excited to learn that partners have much in common, as no diverging opinions or priorities emerged in their work together. Participants identified common areas where they would like to do more, such as involving families and developing students' soft skills to support the transition to college. The REL AP team looks forward to meeting with the members again in December to continue this work to begin defining a common research agenda that builds on the draft logic model.



Teams brainstormed elements of a logic model that will provide a framework for their ongoing work together.



## Virginia Student Success in Mathematics Partnership

Partners from the five Virginia school divisions comprising the [Student Success in Mathematics partnership](#) met at SRI's facilities in Harrisonburg, Virginia on October 16 to work on a logic model that will guide the partnership's training, coaching, and technical support (TCTS), research, and dissemination efforts over the next five years. Guided by Partnership Lead Pam Buffington and Co-Lead Ryoko Yamaguchi, participants-including division staff and school-based mathematics leaders-brainstormed a problem statement and a set of desired outcomes for the partnership, then discussed the extent to which existing division strategies around mathematics could be modified to better align with these. Using the ideas generated at the workshop and taking into consideration the varying levels of success among the divisions, the REL AP team will prepare a draft logic model to present for feedback at the partnership's winter quarterly meeting.



### Cross-State Partnership on Using Data and Evidence to Facilitate Action

On November 13, members of the [Cross-State Partnership](#) on using Data and Evidence to Facilitate Action met virtually for the first of a series of workshops to create a coherent research agenda to build capacity among local stakeholders to access, understand, and use state data resources to inform policy, planning, and practice. Partnership members worked together to identify a common set of priorities and goals of the partnership as well as build the elements of shared logic model. Members identified elements of a problem statement, organized under four headings:

- massive data sets are not user-friendly;
- end users have limited capacity to interpret and use data;
- need to shift the dominant paradigm from attention to data for compliance or accountability to use of data for strategic or program planning will require mutual, two-way collaboration; and
- using data to facilitate action requires making meaning and distilling insights across multiple data sources.

Partners identified outcomes they expected to proceed from their own data initiatives, including targeting dissemination more strategically, creating a common language for local and state leaders, and using data to more successfully achieve common goals. REL AP staff will take the information from this meeting and draft a logic model for partnership review and revision in advance of the next meeting, to be held in February 2018.

## STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

### Meet Members of the REL AP Team

#### Dr. Stephanie Nunn, partnership liaison for the Tennessee Early Literacy partnership

In her first year working with the REL, Stephanie Nunn has taken on the responsibility of serving as the partnership liaison for the Tennessee Early Literacy partnership. Stephanie works closely with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) leadership and staff to develop the response to intervention and instruction (RTI<sup>2</sup>) conceptual framework, with the ultimate goal of creating an RTI<sup>2</sup> implementation assessment tool. In Tennessee, Stephanie uses her extensive experience and knowledge of early childhood research to support this partnership. Stephanie earned her doctorate in education and psychology from the University of Michigan. Her dissertation focused on observing grade 1 literacy interventions as well as mapping time spent in various aspects of literacy instruction over the school year to student reading outcomes. She also completed post-doctoral work at the University of Maryland in the department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education. Stephanie currently lives in Northeast Washington, D.C. with her husband, 7-month-old daughter, and dog. In her free time, she enjoys reading, knitting, yoga, and going on hikes with her newly expanded family.



## COMING SOON...

from REL Appalachia

#### Bridge event: Algebra for All Students

Our Student Success in Mathematics partnership team and Virginia Community School District will host a workshop this month for grade 4-6 teachers and teacher leaders from Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Staunton, Waynesboro, and Winchester that will help participants develop an understanding of mathematics instruction to promote student success in algebra I. Educators will learn about research demonstrating why algebra I is important to student success, strategies they can use now to help students succeed in algebra courses, and resources they can use to build capacity around mathematics teaching at their schools. The video and materials from this workshop can be used by mathematics coaches and teacher leaders across the REL AP region to deliver their own events to build support for preparing all students for success in algebra I. Learn more about the event [here](#).



#### Just-in-time study of Virtual Virginia programs

REL AP staff are conducting a just-in-time research study for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). The request stems from a 2015 Virginia Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission report recommending that VDOE analyze and report student effectiveness data for its online Virtual Virginia (VVa) programs. Using data from the 2015/16 and 2016/17 school years, REL AP staff is conducting

descriptive and correlational analyses of VDOE and VVa data to understand how students who enrolled in and complete online courses such as Advanced Placement and core academic courses perform on available standardized exams compared with similar students who complete the same courses in place-based schools. REL AP staff expects to have draft results later this month and are excited to share our findings in a final report in March 2018.

**REL Appalachia**  
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Independent, Unbiased Research Support for  
Your State's Education Priorities



**ASK-A-REL**

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