



Definitions of Rural: Implications for Educational Policies and Practices



What's in a definition? When it comes to the definition of "Rural", the implications are vast and have profound consequences for the equitable distribution of services and funding in rural constituencies.

Currently, there is inconsistency in the definition and interpretation of "Rural". These inconsistencies can distort the scope of the rural educational system and diminish the issues in rural communities that ultimately impact student achievement. A new research study is now being conducted that will allow the examination of the varying definitions of rural, as well as the purposes served by the definitions, and demographic and geographic profiles describing rural districts and communities in the southwest region.

[Key] Questions to be addressed in this study include:

How is rural defined by different organizations, agencies and researchers and for what purposes?

- * **What are** the principal differences and commonalities among the definitions?
- * **Based on these definitions**, what varying geographic and demographic profiles emerge to describe rural districts and communities in the southwest region? How are they similar and how are they different?
- * **What are** the implications of these varying operational definitions on resource allocation and educational policies and practices?

How is the research data being collected?

Multiple data sources will be accessed to fulfill research objectives. The research team will collect definitions used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Census Bureau, the Office of Management and Budget, and other organizations, agencies and researchers. NCES data will be used to compare the student populations each definition yields. In addition, the research team will gather demographic and educational data from NCES, U.S. Census Bureau, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop varying geographic and demographic profiles.

[When] will this research be available?

- * **Final Reports (January, August and September 2007)** – These reports will contain in-depth detail regarding the scope of the rigorous research, methodologies, data sources, participants, etc., as well as a comprehensive presentation of research results.
- * **January 2007 – Rural Definitions:** This report will provide the varying definitions of rural and the purposes served by each definition.
- * **August 2007 – Rural Profiles:** This report will illustrate the demographic and geographic profiles describing rural districts and communities in the SWREL region based on the varying definitions.
- * **September 2007 – The Implication of “Rural”:** The third report will identify the Implications for educational funding, policies and practices based on rural definitions.

Leading Research Team Engaged for Study

REL Southwest is pleased to announce the esteemed team of researchers that will be leading the effort on the Rural research study. This team represents some of the nation’s leading experts in rural issues.

Lead Researcher:

Dr. Belinda Biscoe

University of Oklahoma

Dr. Biscoe currently directs the program and technical assistance functions of the Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center (MC3) and serves as Assistant Vice President for University Outreach at the University of Oklahoma (OU). She has nearly 30 years of experience with school and community based programs, including higher education as an administrator, researcher, and program developer. She also started and currently directs the E-TEAM (Educational Training, Evaluation, Assessment and Measurement Department) in the College of Continuing Education at OU.

Dr. Biscoe worked for eight years in the Oklahoma City Public School District as a senior research associate and director for Federal and State Support Programs which included bilingual education, homeless education, safe and drug free schools, Johnson O’Malley, Indian Education, Title I, Early Childhood, Family Literacy, and Community

Education. In 1988, she cofounded a community-based non-profit substance abuse prevention and treatment agency, Eagle Ridge Institute, in Oklahoma City. In 2005, the institute employed over 200 individuals. Most recently she has received funding for four early literacy research grants funded by the U.S. Department of Education and one National Science Foundation grant to support efforts to engage students with disabilities in fields of science, math, technology, and engineering.

In her current work with staff and partners at MC3 data has been collected on numerous high impact technical assistance services to document significant changes. Her strengths in working with large systems through partnerships and helping them to reform and build capacity are demonstrated in her work in education and the community and have been the hallmark of her career. She received a doctorate in psychology from the University of Oklahoma in 1982.

She is a psychologist, an internationally certified prevention specialist and an Oklahoma certified drug and alcohol director.

Research Associates:**Dr. Rosemary Dawson***University of Oklahoma*

Dr. Dawson currently holds the position of Director of Development within the Division of the Public and Community Services Department at the University of Oklahoma. She has been at the Norman campus for only three years. Her first 10 years were as the European Director for eight graduate programs at 22 locations throughout Europe. These were the last of the 25 years she spent in Europe; the previous years were as a professor with the University of Southern California and Boston University and as a senior research scientist and manager with the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO).

She also serves as Project Integrator for the rural education fast track research project.

Her major interests lie in managing educational change and program evaluation, which were the focus of her doctoral work. Dr. Dawson received her doctorate in Evaluation, Comprehensive Curriculum and Change Management from the University of California at Los Angeles.

Dr. Michael Arnold*Education Strategy Group*

Michael Arnold is a director with Education Strategy Group, Inc. where he oversees the company's research and development efforts. The firm's work focuses primarily on how rural contexts influence teaching and learning in schools. Prior to joining Education Strategy Group, he managed Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning's Rural Initiative (McREL).

While at McREL, he worked with local, state, and federal officials on school improvement issues. Dr. Arnold also collaborated with other regional educational laboratories on projects such as the former Rural Educational Laboratory Network Program Project, and Pulling Together R&D Resources for Rural Schools. He holds a doctorate in Educational Administration from the University of Michigan.

Dr. Arnold has written extensively on rural education research. Among his most recent publications is *Guiding*

Rural Schools and Districts: A Research Agenda (2004), which identifies ten areas of emphasis for future rural education research. He was also the lead author of *A Look at the Condition of Rural Education Research: Setting a Direction for Future Research* (2005), which examined the quality of the comparative rural education research over the past decade. Dr. Arnold serves on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Research in Rural Education* and on the Board of Reviewers for *The Rural Educator*. He is also past chair of the National Rural Education Association's Research Committee.

Dr. Thomas Farmer*Pennsylvania State University & National Research Center on Rural Education Support*

Former Associate Director of University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's Center for Developmental Science, Dr. Farmer is currently an Assistant Professor of Special Education, with a prolific record of research publication and presentation coupled with extensive involvement in grant-funded research. Since 1995, he has been the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator on 10 research grants totaling more than \$10 million.

His research focuses on school and community based prevention services for at-risk youth as well as educational and intervention services for youth with learning and behavior problems. He also studies the role of the classroom in behavior development and intervention, school transitions for youth with mild disabilities, and aggressive behavior patterns of high-risk youth. In his most recent grant, Project BEST (Behavioral and Emotional Support Training), Dr. Farmer is collaborating with colleagues in the School of Education to develop, evaluate, and disseminate a model for training teachers to work with early adolescents with or at risk of developing learning and behavior problems during the transition to middle school. He holds a doctorate in Special Education from UNC-Chapel Hill.

Dr. Bob Mooneyham*National Rural Education Association*

The National Rural Education Association (NREA) is the oldest established national organization of its kind in the United States. Formerly known as the REA, the Association traces its origins back to 1907 when it was originally founded

as the Department of Rural Education. Through the years, it has evolved as a strong and respected organization of rural school administrators, teachers, board members, regional service agency personnel, researchers, business and industry representatives and others interested in maintaining the vitality of rural school systems across the country. The NREA publishes *The Rural Educator*, an education research journal and the *Rural Education News*, an internal newsletter.

Dr. Mooneyham served as the chief executive officer of the Oklahoma State School Boards Association. He was responsible to the OSSBA Board of Directors, a corporate board comprised of 37 school board members elected by geographical districts. He holds a doctorate in Education Administration and Higher Education from the University of Oklahoma.

[?] Did you know ...

that 49% of Public Schools in Arkansas are in Rural Areas?

	AR	LA	NM	OK	TX
Number of students enrolled in rural schools ¹	157,909	183,623	56,180	197,157	532,378
Percent of students enrolled in rural schools ¹	35.1%	25.7%	18.3%	31.7%	12.8%
Percentage of public schools in rural areas ¹	49.0%	32.0%	35.0%	51.0%	23.0%
Percentage of students attending small rural schools ¹	21.8%	14%	11.3%	24.2%	5.9%
Percentage of rural students who are minorities ¹	18.2%	35.3%	70.6%	35.7%	34.9%
Why Rural Matters 2005 Poverty Gauge Rank ¹	7th	3rd	1st	6th	16th
Why Rural Matters 2005 Overall Priority Ranking ¹	7th	4th	2nd	6th	16th
Number of LEAs eligible for 2005 SRSA Program ²	69	5	45	368	462
Number of Special Education Students	22,107	26,074	10,506	30,165	76,662
Percentage of Special Education Students	14%	14.2%	18.7%	15.3%	14.4%

¹Johnson and Strange, 2005, Why Rural Matters 2005 ²<http://www.ed.gov/programs/reapsrsa/eligible05/index.html>

Valuable Resource:

To learn more about rural issues, contact the National Rural Education Association: www.nrea.net

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REL Southwest run by Edvance Research, Inc., is one of ten educational laboratories in the Regional Educational Laboratory Network (REL Network), the nation's network of support for research-based school reform run by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). REL Southwest serves the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas and works for the benefit of over 6.5 million students, over 400,000 teachers in approximately 14,000 schools in grades pre-kindergarten through college in this five-state region.