IES Institute of Education Sciences

Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia

# A Community of Practice on the Rural Educator Workforce

April 2026

The REL Appalachia Rural Educator Workforce Community of Practice (CoP) brings together education leaders from across the REL's four-state region to collaborate on solutions for strengthening the rural educator workforce. Rural schools—especially high-poverty rural schools—have a particularly difficult time filling teacher vacancies.[1] Yet much of the existing research on effective teacher recruitment, development, and retention strategies has been conducted in urban areas, where findings may not generalize to rural communities.[2]

**To help bridge research and real-world practice, REL Appalachia facilitates shared learning on strategies to support the rural educator workforce across the four areas highlighted below.**

| **Pathways into the Profession** | **Compensation & Working Conditions** | **Induction & Professional Learning** | **Leadership & Advancement** |
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| Tennessee received approval for the first federally registered teacher apprenticeship in 2022. In registered teacher apprenticeships, future teachers earn a wage, learn from a mentor teacher, and work toward licensure and a degree. This strategy can support rural schools to recruit teachers from their own communities. | REL AP partnered with a district in Kentucky to support educator well-being, focusing on resources school leaders can use to implement trainings to support well-being and a positive school climate. These include supports at multiple levels, from targeted individual supports to schoolwide strategies. | A new initiative in Virginia combines a professional learning community with teacher-directed professional learning in which teachers receive a stipend to select the professional learning opportunities that best meet their needs and their own professional learning goals. | West Virginia passed legislation in 2020 to establish a teacher leadership framework. As part of this legislation, the state supports county boards of education to design and implement a framework, with funding available for training opportunities and for stipends to support additional compensation for teacher leader roles. |
| Learn more about registered teacher apprenticeships in our **December 2025 CoP meeting slides**, which feature presentations by CoP members from West Virginia and Tennessee. | Learn more about supports for educator well-being and access additional resources in our **blog post** that stemmed from this partnership with Marshall County Schools. | Learn more about teacher-directed professional learning and other strategies in our **March 2026 CoP meeting slides**. | Learn more about how strategies to support teacher leadership are associated with teacher retention in a **study** from REL Midwest and about career lattice approaches in a **study** from REL Northwest. |

**REL Appalachia is deeply committed to building and sustaining a strong rural educator workforce in the region and across the country.** The CoP facilitates quarterly virtual convenings, maintains a hub of shared resources, and supports collaborative learning efforts. Slides from the quarterly CoP meetings are available on the REL AP website. To learn more about the Rural Educator Workforce CoP or explore opportunities to participate, please reach out to REL AP via email.

[1] Ingersoll, R. M., & Tran, H. (2023). Teacher shortages and turnover in rural schools in the US: An organizational analysis. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 9*(2), 396–431. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0013161X231159922; National Center for Education Statistics. (2024, October 21). *School pulse panel: Surveying high-priority, education-related topics*. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/spp/results.asp?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsflash

[2] Glazerman, S., Isenberg, E., Dolfin, S., Bleeker, M., Johnson, A., Grider, M., & Jacobus, M. (2010). *Impacts of comprehensive teacher induction: Final results from a randomized controlled study* (NCEE 2010-4027). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED565837

Learn more about REL Appalachia and find additional resources: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/region/appalachia

This document was prepared under Contract No. 91990022C0008 by Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.