



LEAD WITH HOPE

Rural education leaders share ideas for improving education and opportunities for students in rural schools.

Zip codes should not determine children's futures. Schools in rural areas serve [more than 40% of US students](#) but receive just 22% of federal support. [One in four](#) of these students lives in poverty. Rural child poverty is a factor that [contributes to low levels of well-being, an effect that can follow individuals throughout their lives](#), particularly if they experienced poverty at an early age.

Battelle for Kids' Rural Education National Forum aims to find ways to improve opportunities for students in rural areas. The annual event brings together rural education leaders from around the country to discuss ways to improve the quality of education and put these students on pathways to college and career success.

This SmartFocus on Rural Education, sponsored by [Battelle for Kids](#), features highlights and take-aways from the 2015 forum. See how hope operates as an agent of change; get ideas for creating programs to prepare students for college and the workforce; and learn how "invested communities" can provide fresh opportunities for students.

HOPE AS A STRATEGY

The path to college and career readiness for rural students should be paved with hope, according to James Mahoney, executive director, and Jamie Meade, managing director of Learning and Leading at Battelle for Kids. Mahoney and Meade discussed the value and role of hope during their sessions.

"Hope is a strategy," said Mahoney during his keynote address. "I know that cold doesn't cause snow, but I also know that it won't snow unless it is cold."

"Hope may not technically be a strategy, but I can tell you this: You're not going to have a successful [strategy] without it," he noted.

Hope is more than wishful thinking. It has three components: goals, agency and pathways. "If you set goals, create pathways and give kids agency, that's how hope really manifests itself," Mahoney said.

Meade expanded on this three-pronged concept of hope during her session, "Mindset Matters."

Goals. Students need to have a line of sight for the future. "Goals are about thinking forward, and being



optimistic certainly is a part of hopefulness, but it's also not enough to have the goal," Meade said. "You have to understand that what I do — my agency — and how I apply that to my future — matters," she said. "Hope is active; it's not passive."

Agency. Give students the skills they need to rise above deficits. Build their confidence by giving them competence through practice and improvement. "Hopeful students think their future will be

better than the present, and that they have the power to make it so," Meade said. "In the classroom, this might look like: 'Yes, I'm going to challenge you in this classroom, but I'm going to pair it with the right level of support and let you know that I believe in you so much that I believe you absolutely are capable of more challenging work.'"

Pathways. Students need multiple pathways. "Research tells us there must be multiple pathways to a goal," Meade said. "Hopeless people get stuck when they can't figure out other pathways. Students drop out because they can't find a pathway forward."

"Hope costs nothing," Meade said. "Hope is not correlated with IQ. The sweet spot of hope is knowing that your present does not determine your future."

Forum speakers highlighted a variety of pathway models that can serve as beacons of hope for rural education leaders. Leaders from the Ohio Department of Education shared their philosophy about regional models, and school district leaders from a Mississippi district shined a light on the path less traveled.

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

How do we help more young people earn credentials and degrees that matter in today's economy?

Steve Gratz, senior executive director, and Carolyn George, Career Connections administrator, at the [Ohio Department of Education](#) recommend a regional model with pathways tailored to students' interests and industry needs. They discussed some of the philosophies behind the approach during their session, "Designing Career Pathways for ALL Students."

"What you want to focus on when you're looking at the pathway model is what's happening regionally," Gratz said. "That's the key part because what's happening

Beyond policy: A lesson in hope from John B. King, Jr.

John B. King, Jr, acting secretary of education, shares his personal story of hope. He urges educators to think about what they can do to provide maximum opportunity for their students.

"We have a policy agenda, but we also have — as educators — a responsibility to try to instill hope," King told attendees during his luncheon remarks.

"I'm alive today because of the teachers I had," King said. He lost his mom when he was in fourth grade, and his dad lived with undiagnosed Alzheimer's until he died. "Home was this scary, unpredictable place, but school was this inspiring, engaging, life-transforming place."

"Teachers created a space where I wanted to be. When I was in class, I wasn't thinking about what was going to happen at home that night; when I was in that space, I was focused on trying to learn," he said. "Teachers looked at me and saw hope and opportunity and invested in me. That's why I am here today."

"We all know that moment when you connect with a student and know that you are helping them make it through whatever difficult circumstance they are going through, giving them a sense of what's possible," King said.

"The question for all of us as we think about the future of rural education is: How can we ensure for every kid, regardless of zip code, income or what's going on at home — how can we ensure maximum opportunity in life? How can we ensure they are prepared to succeed in college and careers and contribute as citizens of a community, and how do we do that in a way that knits together our communities and preserves our sense of community?"



regionally may not be reflective of what's taking place in the state."

"Some still look at two different pathways [one for college or one for vocational], but we want to bring it together into one — bring skills together at a level that meets the needs of industry, and in which students are earning credentials," Gratz said.

Gratz and George shared these take-aways to help inform a pathway strategy:

- **Start early.** Career awareness begins early and happens often. The Career Connections Framework for K-12 in Ohio calls for career awareness beginning in elementary school. Elementary students learn more about career pathways and take part in career-exploration activities, such as workplace visits. Students continue to hone their interests and skills during middle and high school.
- **Show them the opportunities.** There are a range of job opportunities in a specific career pathway. Students need to know about all the jobs available in the music industry, for example, Gratz said, noting that there can

only be one Usher, but there are many people working in the music industry who make his career possible.

- **Award credits.** Give credit when credit is earned. Students should earn postsecondary credentials during their K-12 careers. Dual-credit programs, cooperative-education programs and a flexible approach to credits all can help make this possible.

GULFPORT SCHOOL DISTRICT, MISSISSIPPI

The [Gulfport School District](#) in Mississippi launched a pilot program and redesigned how the district approaches secondary education. Superintendent Glen East and Director of Instructional Program Carla Evers shared their district's transition in their session, "Pathways to College and Career Readiness."

Here are some of the highlights of what's happening in what Evers describes as a "lone-wolf district" in the state:

- Career planning begins when students are in fourth grade.

SOUTHERN DOOR COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT, WISCONSIN

Why create an invested community?

"I think we can all agree that the school's purpose is to create students who are college- and career-ready, and a school that is able to provide a balanced offering of opportunities for their students gives them a great chance to be that college and career student," said National Rural Teacher of the Year Jessica Meacham during her keynote presentation. "And college and career students are important because they are the future workforce."

Meacham teaches first grade at [Southern Door County School District](#).

"Communities, whether they know it or not, have a part in the school experience," she said. "They can come alongside the school and build a partnership, and what we've done in the district over the last three years is build the partnership."

Meacham recommends a "what if they say 'yes?'" approach and this four-point formula for creating an invested community:

1. Think of possibilities.

Think about students, families, day-to-day operations, facilities and the community. And do it without worrying about budget, Meacham advises. "If you worry about the budget, those big ideas aren't going to happen," she said.

2. Identify partners.

3. Share stories. Tell community members how schools are changing so they can perhaps decide how to get involved. "We share our stories through district newsletters, website, Facebook page, Twitter, and we share stories through a community conversation — a time when community, partners, students and educators develop key interests and vote on these and then create a hierarchy of needs," Meacham explained.

4. Drum up support. "Sometimes in this process, additional partners hear about [our community partnerships], and they approach us," Meacham said.



- Students earn all credits necessary for graduation by tenth grade. They then choose to pursue specific career academies.
- All students take the first ACT for free.
- Career exposure is deep and rich.
- Students have three diploma options: Regular diploma, college and career-ready and an advanced college and career-ready diploma.

EDUCATING EVERYONE, TAKES EVERYONE

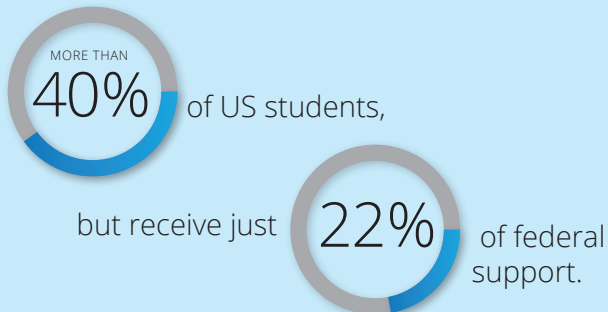
“We need to develop, organize and nurture rural collaboratives,” said James Mahoney, executive director of Battelle for Kids. “Educating everyone takes everyone.”

“My hope for rural America is that we have rural collaboratives that serve regional populations that don’t just collect dots, but connect dots,” he said. What are the benefits of rural education collaboratives?

1. Rural education collaboratives offer a real and viable way to overcome a deficit mindset often held by policymakers and rural educators themselves.
2. Many collaboratives are on the cutting edge of the learning revolution. They are flipping the script on how learning can be more personalized and have a higher payoff for individuals and communities.
3. Collaboratives can help make rural schools and communities more addressable markets for public and private investment.
4. Collaboratives can help overcome the “square peg syndrome” in terms of funding and policy. This means promoting a flexible policy framework that can adapt to specific rural strengths and needs.

Stay tuned for Battelle for Kids’ new report on rural education collaboratives, *Generating Opportunity and Prosperity: The Promise of Rural Education Collaboratives* ■

SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS SERVE



1 in 4 students in rural schools lives in poverty.

WHAT IS A COLLABORATIVE?

A collaborative is a group of individuals and organizations working together to increase educational opportunities and raise the quality of education in rural areas through a variety of strategies such as:

- Sharing resources
- Scaling up and sustaining effective programs and best practices
- Preparing students to be college and career ready
- Communicating with and mobilizing stakeholders
- Advancing economic development

SAVE THE DATES

- Rural Education National Forum and 108th NREA Convention and Research Symposium
- October 13-15, 2016, Ohio Union at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
- In the spirit of collaboration, Battelle for Kids will partner with the National Rural Education Association (NREA) to host the 2016 event designed to bring rural education leaders from around the country. To learn more, visit <http://battelleforkids.org/events/rural-education-forum>.

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