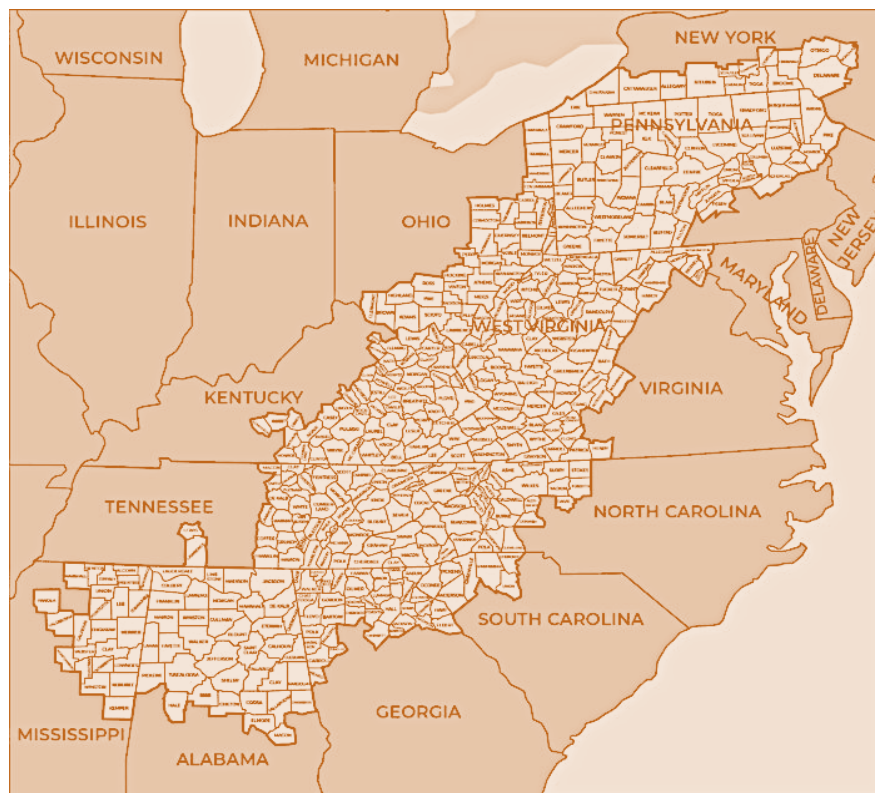# Community Colleges of Appalachia (CCA)
Rural Educator Academy (REA) Pilot Program
Radically Reimagining Educational Equity in Action

Evaluation Report & Core Competencies

LAUNCH Student Success

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BACKGROUND AND VISION

In early 2022, the Community Colleges of Appalachia (CCA) in collaboration with the Ascendium Education Group and participating member institutions, leaders, community members, students, faculty and staff embarked on a journey to create the inaugural leadership academy for our Rural Educator Academy (REA). The goal was to design and pilot a professional development program to enhance the skill sets of CCA member college faculty, staff, and leaders to improve rural Appalachian student success outcomes.

The REA is a unique, two-pronged approach to professional development that will yield sustained improvements in rural student success. Recognizing that change must occur at the institutional and course levels, the REA is designed as two complementary experiences: 1) a REA for institutional leaders and 2) a REA for faculty and student services staff.

Through this professional development academy, CCA is creating a community of practice across Appalachia focused on ways to improve success metrics for rural students who are low-income and students of color throughout the Appalachian Region.

EVALUATION

Survey

The Rural Educator Academy Initial Evaluation was designed to understand the profile of rural students within the member colleges of the Community Colleges of Appalachia and how staff, faculty, and leaders are currently delivering support inside and outside of the classroom to improve success for all rural students.

Survey Results and Key Findings

The breakdown of roles amongst the 713 respondents are noted in the table below.

CATEGORY	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
STUDENTS	150	21.04%
COMMUNITY MEMBERS	18	2.52 %
STAFF	221	31.00 %
FACULTY	171	23.98 %
LEADERS	72	10.10 %
SKIPPED RESPONSES	27	3.79 %
DECLINED CONSENT	54	7.57 %
TOTAL	713	100 %

Student Responses Were Overall Positive:

- Most of the student respondents felt that they were capable of success (70% agreed or strongly agreed).
- When asked how the students rated their own self-efficacy, 78% rated themselves strong or very strong.
- 77% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the campus is able to assist them and their fellow students with their needs.
- 75% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what they needed to be successful as a student.
- 62% of students believe that their campus provides enough resources to help them and their fellow students succeed.
- 67% know what campus resources are available to them.
- 57% of the student respondents believe that their campuses check in regularly with them and their fellow students on their goals.

In reviewing the survey data related specifically to students, there are a few limitations to note. While all students across the Community Colleges of Appalachia were invited to take the survey, this data represents just a subset of the overall student body. While the students who completed the survey had high self-efficacy scores overall, this may <u>not</u> be reflective of the majority of students. The students who completed the survey may be highly engaged students who were not only aware of the survey but also had the space and time to complete it with positive responses overall.

150 students across the CCA responded to the following survey question: *"What Holds Students Back from Academic Success?"* The top six responses:

1. Lack of financial resources (77%)
2. Balancing college work and family (64%)
3. Lack of motivation (55%)
4. Time management (47%)
5. Lack of college readiness (43%)
6. Limited self-efficacy (38%)

The Survey Questions can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews

Current CCA presidents, who also serve on the CCA executive leadership team, agreed to 45-minute interviews to share their perspective on their role, opportunity, and increase of rural Appalachian student success. Two executive board members, one program partner with the Ohio Appalachian Community Colleges, and two CCA member staff members participated in the interviews. The Interview Questions can be found in Appendix A.

Focus Groups

90-minute Focus Groups were open to all CCA member leaders, faculty, staff, students, and community members with the goal of mapping the Appalachian terrain, by listening to the "boots-on-the-ground" perspectives and lived experience of current CCA member institutions. Three days and times were equitably scheduled, and an opportunity for each audience to share their thoughts, ideas, best practices and insights into providing equitable environments for rural student success.... There were 10 leaders, 23 faculty members, 24 staff, and 4 community members who participated in the focus groups. The Focus Group Questions can be found in Appendix A.

Interview & Focus Group Key Themes

During the interviews and focus groups, eight key themes emerged:

1. Access to Wifi Connectivity and Technology Is Consistently Shared as an Infrastructure and Financial Challenge

While some regions have been able to improve wifi connectivity and provide access to technology that students did not have before, these issues continue to pose a challenge in certain regions. Issues with wifi connectivity and uneven access to technology became most apparent when faculty discovered instances of students writing papers using their smartphones, coming to campus in order to access wifi and take classes, and completing assignments from the parking lot or other areas where wifi access was available (i.e., McDonald's/Starbucks parking lots).

2. Building and Maintaining Strong Ties Between the Colleges and the Local Community Has Been a Success

Some of the successes that colleges shared focused on strong town-gown relations. Colleges with strong partnerships in the community have access to internship programs for students,

funding opportunities through lending, seamless workforce placement programs, and trusting relationships to further support students at the community college.

3. Family Is a Strength and a Challenge

Leaders acknowledged that families were a source of strength for many students while recognizing that they could also hinder student progress as well. Leaders shared that some families expressed more support for their students to attend a 4-year degree program over a 2-year degree program. Others were not supportive of a community college education at all, feeling that it would not necessarily benefit them going directly into the workforce after high school. In some situations, the student might be married, responsible for caring for aging parents or grandparents, and/or caring for a child or children. Students are thereby challenged with balancing their various roles - family life, working, and being a student.

4. Defining and Deepening Their Understanding of the Student Experience Overall

One of the leaders shared that when attending college, the messages they received were that college was the priority. They compared this message with the reality for many students attending a member college of the Community Colleges of Appalachia, which focuses on ensuring that they can meet basic needs of food, transportation, childcare, and related needs. This reality is particularly evident among students coming from families experiencing intergenerational poverty.

5. Providing Resources and Support to Students Academically and Non-Academically

Leaders emphasized the need to meet students where they are. Leaders indicated they need to use empathy to understand that before a student could succeed academically, they needed to ensure that their day-to-day needs were addressed, including concerns around finances, transportation, childcare, parents, etc. Successes related to addressing these needs included food pantries, emergency funding programs, childcare assistance, and other related student support resources.

6. Adjusting the Curriculum to Make Learning Relevant and Connected to Local Industry Opportunities

An opportunity for improvement in some regions was to provide more relevant connections between the curricular offerings and the strengths of the local industry. For example, if there were colleges with a plethora of healthcare employment opportunities in nursing in the local area, the community college curriculum should have a strong nursing program. Taking that a step further would lead to community connections between the healthcare system in the region with the college, resulting in internship opportunities, job placement access, and other ways to remove barriers to employment.

7. Need for Success Coaches, Tutors, Advisors, and Mentors to Provide an Embedded System of Support for Students

Some of the colleges shared success stories related to a student success program incorporating coaches who would check in with students at regular intervals. Success stories also noted tutoring programs that continue to serve students at increasing rates. One idea that was shared was training students to advise and mentor their peers. This could deepen student engagement and connection, thereby enhancing their student experience overall.

8. Value of Helping Students Develop Confidence and a Growth Mindset

Leaders noted that some students come from a fixed mindset and lack a good grasp of the possibilities that could be. Having perhaps grown up in families experiencing intergenerational poverty, with limited resources, and limited support for pursuing higher education, some of these students lacked a growth mindset.

These key themes, based on the findings from the Literature Review, and in conjunction with the Core Competencies, will serve as the foundational focus in building the REA pilot curriculum.

Literature Review

This literature review seeks to explore and understand the leading research and best practices responsible for increased success of rural Appalachian students. It comprises information gathered from three main streams: relevant contemporary published literature; where possible, existing model programs; and, lastly, the focus groups, which captured stories and testimonies of the rural Appalachian community-college students, faculty, leadership, and community. The insights that surfaced from focus-group data were examined through the lens of relevant literature. As the analysis of the literature, interviews, and focus-group responses deepened, what was initially considered the eight key themes (outlined above on pages 5-7 of this report), were soon seen as seven key themes. The primary reason for this adjustment centered around what type of support is truly needed for rural Appalachian students to succeed, along with the type of support needed for leaders, faculty, and staff to assist their students, colleagues, and communities to be successful as well.

Seven themes emerged, first centering on the individual student experience, then branching into personal, academic, and institutional systems that impact student success. Where possible, findings are punctuated with anecdotal observations of existing model programs in the Appalachian region. Addressed are (1) the necessity of understanding the rural Appalachian student experience and (2) its intersection with the digital divide. The themes then turn to the impact of (3) personal bonds, (4) locally relevant curriculum, (5) rural educational support, rounding out with (6) institutional partnerships, and the closing theme examining how to instill and ensure (7) "a growth mindset". These seven key themes, along with the established core competencies, will be the foundation of the Rural Educator Academy's pilot curriculum.

1. Understanding the Rural Student Experience

To understand the factors impacting student success for community college students in the Appalachian region, one must begin with understanding the rural student experience.

Issues of equity, high poverty rates and income inequality, low graduation rates, rural culture, obstacles for social and economic mobility, food and basic needs insecurity, fixed mindset, and infrastructure play into the educational achievements and success of students in the Appalachian region.

"While all rural communities are not monolithic, rural communities have systematically experienced significant poverty due to the loss of economic bases (Roscigno et al., 2006;

Roscigno & Crowley, 2001; Williams & Grooms, 2016). The poverty and loss of economic bases often lead to the tension for rural students who must make difficult decisions to stay in their communities, filled with rich connections to the people and place, or leave for locations with more postsecondary education or career options, potentially never returning (Kotok et al., 2016; Means, Clayton, Conzelmann, Baynes, & Umbach, 2016; Petrin, Schafft, & Meece, 2014; Sage & Sherman, 2014; Wright, 2012)." (Means, D. R., 2018). The literature expands on this topic in light of the pandemic, "The endemic poverty, poor health outcomes, and lack of services already causing devastation in rural communities have been compounded by the pandemic and have taken their toll on rural community colleges and those they serve." (Rush-Marlowe, R., 2021).

Some of this is borne out when looking at rural educational attainment, in which:
- rural women are increasingly more educated than rural men,
- educational attainment is generally higher for younger cohorts,
- racial and ethnic minorities in rural areas lag behind whites in educational attainment,
- urban areas offer higher earnings and employment for workers with more education, and
- rural counties with low levels of educational attainment have worse economic outcomes.

(Dobis, E. A., Krumel, T., Cromartie, J., Conley, K., Sanders, A., Ortiz, R., 2021).

According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, "78% of Appalachian adults above the age of twenty-five have not obtained a bachelor's degree, and the rate of bachelor's degrees among adults in Central Appalachia is slightly below 14%." (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2015).

Expanding the lens into the student experience in the schools, "Often, rural students struggle with building and fostering additional relationships in school. It is often difficult for rural students to feel the full effects of the community that is involved in education because of the proximity of their residencies to town. Many rural students and their families must make long commutes to work and school and are unable to return after going home in the evenings, which causes them to miss out on social opportunities related to school. Distance becomes a barrier to being fully integrated into the educational system (Preston, 2013). Rural students feel further ostracized by the cultural barriers that often exist between them, their teachers, and classroom material. Hendrickson (2012) found rural students often fail to see a connection between their lives and the classroom material and often believe their teachers do not care for them and do not take into the considerations their unique situations that sometimes include outside jobs, family obligations, and healthcare." (Slone, 2020).

"Besides demographic issues that can cause complications for education in rural Appalachia, there is also the issue of teacher preparedness (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Thompson, McNicholl, & Menter, 2016). Research shows even teachers who hail from rural areas themselves are often underprepared to deal with some of the realities of teaching in rural schools (Azano & Stewart, 2015). Often teachers are unprepared to handle the needs of under-funded schools or the pressures of working with students who live in poverty. (Azano & Stewart, 2015)." (Slone, 2020).

The impact on rural students of color and first-generation college students is even more stark, yet paradoxically almost invisible, "Although one in four rural students are students of color (Showalter et al., 2017), students of color and their families are overwhelmingly absent from research and the national dialogue on rural America." (Means, D. R., 2018). Although largely absent in most research, some were able to point to research in this realm that provides insights into achieving student success for students of color. "Researchers have found rural students of color experience constraints on their pathways to and through higher education. (Byun et al. 2012a; Means et al., 2016). For example, Irvin, Byun, Meece, Reed, and Farmer (2016) found that teachers had lower expectations for rural African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American youth when compared to rural white youth. Additionally, rural students of color perceived there to be more educational barriers for pursuing postsecondary education than their white rural peers" (Ali & Menke, 2014; Irvin, Byun, Meece, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2012). "O'Connor, Hammack, and Scott (2010) found that rural white students 'are twice as likely as rural Hispanics to attend a 4-year college (p. 215), and Strayhorn (2009) found that Black, rural, male students have lower college aspirations than their urban and suburban peers." (Means, D. R., 2018). This intersects with the experience that students who are first in their family to attend college have. "First generation college students are strongly influenced by their parents as well as their peers and place a strong dependence on mentors both in the educational system and in the community (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Hlinka, 2017; Nelson, 2016)." (Slone, 2020).

For educators, deepening their knowledge of students' experience is a crucial factor in supporting student success and the absence of that understanding comes at a tremendous cost to the students, families and their communities. Means encourages educators to challenge preconceived assumptions. "All professionals who serve students as they make choices about pursuing postsecondary education should individually and collectively challenge deficit perspectives (Harper, 2012) that place the blame of inequitable educational outcomes on rural students and their families (Howley et al., 2014; Rhodes, 2014), especially for families of color and low-income and working-class families. This could be accomplished in several ways: 1) professionals should examine their own biases and consider how this shows up in

their work as they support students making choices about pursuing higher education, and 2) leaders of college enrollment management and college admission offices should examine their policies and practices that reflect deficit-oriented perspectives." (Means, D. R., 2018). These decisions of self-examination should be built upon the understanding that "...goals, given the person has the requisite ability, motivate action." (Locke, E. A. & Latham, G. P., 1990).

The Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program serves as a model for understanding the student experience noting that: "But as important as analyzing data to assess student outcomes is, so too is engaging in rigorous analysis of the student experience. Data is essential to understanding which students struggle, but the student voice is needed to understand why and to bring the data to life." (Aspen Institute: Understanding the Student Experience)

2. Digital Divide

The data provides clarity that Appalachian residents face significant challenges in access, infrastructure and affordability of high-speed internet connectivity and technology. "During the 2013-2017 period, 72 percent of Appalachian households had a broadband internet subscription, roughly six percentage points below the national average. But in 80 of the Region's counties, the share was less than 60 percent…." (Pollard, Jacobson, 2019). "The share of Appalachian households with a computer device (desktop, laptop, smartphone, tablet, or other device) in 2013-2017 was five percentage points below the national average (82 percent compared with 87 percent).... Device ownership in many of the Region's urban counties was near or above the national average, but levels in many rural counties were far lower. In 127 of Appalachia's 420 counties less than 75 percent of households had a computer device, with the vast majority concentrated outside metropolitan areas and a sizeable share in Central Appalachia (eastern Kentucky, plus adjacent counties in West Virginia, Virginia, and Tennessee)." (Pollard, Jacobson, 2019). A further layer in this data also speaks to the disparities between rural and urban areas, this "data suggests that Appalachia faces a digital divide—not just between the Region's households and the rest of the nation but also between the Region's rural and more urban areas, say the authors of a Population Reference Bureau (PRB) report for the Appalachian Regional Commission." (Pollard, K., Jacobsen, L., 2019).

This digital divide has significant implications for student success. "Given that high-speed internet access is credited with enhancing economic growth and development, these are signs that many communities in the Region may be at risk of being left behind." (Pollard, Jacobson, 2019).

The focus groups which were part of the evaluation process noted that:

While some regions have been able to improve high speed internet connectivity and provide access to technology that students did not have before, these issues continue to pose a challenge in many rural regions. Issues with high-speed internet connectivity and uneven access to technology became most apparent when faculty discovered instances of students writing papers using their smartphones, coming to campus in order to access wifi and take classes, and completing assignments from the parking lot or other areas where wifi access was available (e.g., McDonald's/Starbucks parking lots).

3. Personal Bonds

The importance of personal and familial ties for student success, especially in rural communities, is underscored widely in the literature. "Rural students place a high amount of value on place and relationships, particularly family relationships (Hendrickson, 2012; Hlinka, 2017). First generation college students are strongly influenced by their parents as well as their peers and place a strong dependence on mentors both in the educational system and in the community (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Gibbons & Woodside, 2014; Hlinka, 2017; Nelson, 2016)." (Slone, 2020).

"Positive emotion can be about the past, the present, or the future. The positive emotions about the future include optimism, hope, faith and trust. Those about the present include joy, ecstasy, calm, zest, ebullience, pleasure, and (most importantly) flow; these emotions are what most people usually mean when they casually - but much too narrowly - talk about "happiness." The positive emotions about the past include satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, pride, and serenity." (Seligman, M. 2011). Awareness of the role of positive emotions leads to increased insight and inquiry for all campus community members alike, thus fostering increased personal connection, understanding, and empathy. "What people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave. The natural and extrinsic effects of their actions, in turn, partly determine their thought patterns and affective reactions." (Bandura, A., 1986).

Additionally, "Rural students have described receiving support from family members, school counselors, teachers, coaches, and peers to pursue higher education and to shape their future plans as a critical source of social capital" (Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011; Means et al., 2016). Expounding on that thought, Means notes, "The tight-knit communities often found in rural communities are used to leverage and develop stronger relationships within the community (Byun et al., 2012b; Johnson & Zoellner, 2016; Means et al., 2016; Tieken, 2014). Alleman and Holly (2013) discussed the critical role that local businesses, postsecondary education institutions, civic organizations, and faith-based organizations played in supporting rural students in their pursuit of higher education. Specifically, church attendance was

associated with college enrollment (Smith et al., 1995) and rural Black students relied on religious leaders to serve as a critical source of college-going support (Griffin et al., 2011)." (Means, D. R., 2018).

Being intentional in establishing these important relationships further ensures the rural students' commitment to their own success. As Locke and Latham underscore, "Commitment refers to the degree to which the individual is attached to the goal, considers it significant or important, is determined to reach it, and keeps it in the face of setbacks and obstacles. It must be stressed, however, that the feeling of commitment does not automatically lead one to act in accordance with it." (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Within the focus group discussions, school leaders acknowledged that families were a source of strength for many students while recognizing that they could also hinder student progress as well. Leaders shared that some families expressed more support for their students to attend a four-year degree program over a two-year degree program. Others were not supportive of a community college education at all, feeling that it would not necessarily benefit them going directly into the workforce after high school. In some situations, the student might be married, responsible for caring for aging parents or grandparents, and/or caring for a child or children. Students are thereby challenged with balancing their various roles: family, working, and being a student. It is clear that the whole student and the relationships to family and personal support systems must be considered as central to student success.

4. Locally Relevant Curriculum

An opportunity for improvement in some Appalachian regions is to provide more relevant connections between the curricular offerings and the strengths of the local industry. "Industries with the most job growth are rapidly evolving, often faster than many institutions can respond with changes to their programs or curricula." (Bahr, P.R., Bailey, T., Carnevale, A.P., Gianneschi, M., Kelly, P., Miller, B., Schneider, M., Whitfield, C., 2015). "The fundamental, but thorny, challenge that lies at the core of what community colleges today face is how to increase degree completion and, at the same time, make sure that the degrees students complete have enduring labor market value after they leave." (Aspen Institute - College Excellence Program: Improving Labor Market Outcomes). "New delivery models—competency-based education and assessment, online courses and certificates, and badges are being developed and championed by everyone from policymakers to foundations to higher education associations as ways of helping students demonstrate their skills and abilities to employers alongside (and in some cases instead of) degrees." (Bahr, P.R., Bailey, T., Carnevale, A.P., Gianneschi, M., Kelly, P., Miller, B., Schneider, M., Whitfield, C., 2015).

While fostering a new approach to curriculum and instruction, community college leaders, faculty, and staff can also be intentional on how rural students are taught and mentored to set goals and achieve them. Locke and Latham remind us that "...assigning people goals, accompanied by a rationale, leads to as high a level of goal commitment as having people participate in the setting of their goals." (Locke & Latham, 1990). This process of setting goals can lead to increasing students' optimism about their own success. "Optimism is invaluable for the meaningful life. With a firm belief in a positive future, you can throw yourself into the service of that which is larger than you are." (Seligman, M. 2011). "Organizations in this field, including the Aspen Institute, are focusing on curricular efforts to prepare Community College leadership to respond in this area. "...increasingly, it is clear that simply raising graduation rates alone will not be enough to deliver what students and employers need." (Aspen Institute - [College Excellence Program: Improving Labor Market Outcomes](#))

Living in a rural area does not adequately prepare teachers to connect their teaching material to students and does not automatically make them able to motivate students who are at a socioeconomic disadvantage (Azano & Stewart, 2015). "Teachers who hail from rural areas may be better able to make surface-level connections between course work and the every-day lives of their students, but there is a lack of deep connection and meaning that must come from more specialized training." (Slone, 2020)

In the focus groups conducted, participants shared these additional thoughts that underpin the findings in the literature:
An opportunity for improvement in some regions was to provide more relevant connections between the curricular offerings and the strengths of the local industry. For example, if there were a college with a plethora of healthcare employment opportunities in nursing in the local area, the community college curriculum should have a strong nursing program. Taking that a step further would lead to community connections between the healthcare system in the region with the college, resulting in internship opportunities, job placement access, and other ways to remove barriers to employment.

5. Rural Education Support

Even though the focus is to improve the skill set and awareness at the post-secondary level, there are some key insights to be learned from the educational partners in the K-12 space. Highlighting the model created by Battelle for Kids which focuses on supporting rural faculty and staff, there are multiple district-wide and regional educational networks and collaborations that have been powerful spaces within which to support the practice of educational equity. These networks are especially powerful in rural communities, even those physically distanced from one another.

"There are many academic institutions, organizations (for-profit and nonprofit), programs, and campaigns currently fostering some form of a 'Community of Practice' which enacts an 'all-hands-on-deck' approach to address and circumvent the myriad of issues currently faced by not only rural Appalachian students, but the administrators, faculty, and staff who are charged with creating an equitable campus culture where students, their families, and the local communities can thrive. Research has shown that the most effective way to move the needle on rural student-success metrics is to intentionally create these networks of resources and change agents also known as 'Education Change Networks' and 'Rural Education Collaboratives,' more commonly known as RECs. There is a growing conversation around RECs, which are two or more rural school districts with a shared common purpose to be visible, active, established, and organized around a shared vision of increasing student success. These collaboratives share a focus on improving practice by pursuing real solutions that create value for rural students. These peer-to-peer learning networks are very clear and intentional about using specific metrics to achieve aligned outcomes, not just solely being service organizations. Some of the common strategies of the RECs involve resource sharing, advocacy, curriculum design, scaling programs and best practices, and preparing rural students for college and career, while utilizing a holistic and comprehensive approach to combining all these elements. "Regardless of place and purpose, the RECs we studied share one common cause—the relentless pursuit of greater rural educational opportunity. There is no doubt that collaboration is a vital and pervasive part of rural education." (Battelle for Kids, 2016).

These collaborations also serve as a catalyst for creating team and community well-being amongst the shareholders in this work. "Well-being cannot exist just in your own head. Well-being is a combination of feeling good as well as having meaning, good relationships, and accomplishment." (Seligman, M., 2011).

The literature highlights the potential power and tangible results of these educational collaboratives. The lived experience of students and their communities shapes the behaviors expressed and decisions made, which is also known as "culture," or the collection of habits, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that undergird our collective decision making as human beings. Dr. David Matsumoto, who is world-renowned for his research in the areas of culture and psychology, says he "...came to realize that culture played as basic and important a role in understanding and contributing to human behavior as did any other influence on our lives, and to gradually understand its pervasive and profound influence on psychological processes in all areas of functioning." (Matsumoto, D., 2002).

"There is great promise in rural collaboratives to help elevate the voice of rural districts; uplift and empower isolated educators, administrators, and students; and use limited resources to tackle big issues." (Ohio Appalachian Collaborative, Rural Education Collaboratives: A Closer Look). Past research has found that students in rural areas express a reluctance to leave their community and concerns about the cost of living elsewhere, internalize family expectations to maintain the family farm or business, experience conflicting values in relation to continuing education, and/or feel lost in the academic jargon of the application and admissions process (Ardoin, 2013; Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012; Irvin, Byun, Meece, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2012; Elder, King, & Conger, 1996; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011; McDonough, Gildersleeve, & McClafferty-Jarsky, 2010). Together these factors present a significant barrier for rural students' college application, enrollment, and completion (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012)." (Battelle for Kids, 2016).

Participants in the Focus Groups shared some success stories related to a student success program incorporating coaches who would check in with students at regular intervals. Success stories also noted tutoring programs that continue to serve students at increasing rates. One idea that was shared was training students to advise and mentor their peers. This could deepen student engagement and connection, thereby enhancing their student experience overall.

6. Institutional Partners

The many layered relationships between colleges and the local community, often referred to as "Town-Gown Relations," serve as essential linkages for the success of all students, schools and communities, and especially so in communities that have been historically or currently under-resourced and/or marginalized. "The factors that have contributed to the invisibility of rural schools, districts, and students and their families include geographic isolation, economic challenges associated with loss of industry and economic bases, poverty, lower school district budget revenue, and lack of political capital (Johnson & Zoellner, 2016; Sage & Sherman, 2014; Tieken, 2014; Williams & Grooms, 2016)." (Means, D. R., 2018).

Further, Means argues, "State and federal educational policies and initiatives have systematically overlooked and made invisible rural schools, districts, and students and their families (Tieken, 2014; Williams & Grooms, 2016), which is alarming given approximately half of school districts are small rural districts and there are 8.9 million students who attend rural schools in the United States (Showalter, Klein, Johnson, & Hartman, 2017)." (Means, D. R., 2018).

It is important that the supporting network of campus and community intentionally set their own goals for supporting students. "Latham, Winters, and Locke (1991) have suggested that the key benefits of participation are not due to motivation (e.g., goal commitment) but rather to cognition (e.g., task strategy development). Their study found that although participation enhanced a self-report measure of goal commitment, it was not sufficient to make a difference in actual performance. In contrast, participation in developing effective task strategies had substantial effects on performance through the mediating effects of self-efficacy and the quality of the strategies which the subjects developed and used." (Locke, E. A. & Latham, G. P., 1990).

The literature suggests that leaders should focus on holistic and varied approaches which include the whole community. "Leaders, counselors, teachers, and other professionals working in rural schools and school districts have an opportunity to capitalize on resources available in their communities to enhance support for college access and enrollment. This support could come in the form of collaborating with local businesses, community civic organizations, religious organizations, and any nearby postsecondary education institutions to mentor students on the college admission process, as well as future career and college opportunities, offer workshops or resources related to college enrollment, and/or organize visits to colleges and universities." (Means, D. R., 2018).

The best models for thriving campus/community relations focus holistically on the entire continuum of a student life and across the many institutions with whom students and their families interact. "The educational continuum starts at K-12 (or community-based adult education) and continues on through community colleges, four-year universities, and post-education employment, posing a set of challenges related to curricular alignment, actionable data, and the needs of a diverse student body that can be effectively addressed only through multi-institutional partnerships." (Aspen Institute, Module - Leading Highly Effective External Strategic Partnerships).

One example of deeper engagement between colleges and high schools, includes "Developing stronger partnerships between high school counselors and college recruitment, admission, orientation, and transition staff would provide a bridge for high school students, parents, and counselors to engage in the valuable conversation exposing the often-hidden curriculum of higher education." (Christiane Oliveri, Karen Funke, Jennifer Clark, and Tricia A. Seifert, 2018). Means suggests more specifically "Leaders of college admission and enrollment offices should consider how to enhance outreach to rural communities. This could be in the form of visiting high schools in rural communities, sending college materials to rural high schools, hosting rural high schools for college visitations, and communicating directly with rural school counselors to determine their needs and receive feedback on supporting rural students with college access and enrollment." (Means, D. R., 2018).

Participants in the Focus Groups shared these additional thoughts about town-gown relations. Some of the successes that colleges shared focused on strong town-gown relations. Colleges with strong partnerships in the community have access to internship programs for students, funding opportunities through lending, seamless workforce placement programs, and trusting relationships to further support students at the community college.

7. A Growth Mindset

The literature substantiates that the key factor to the success of any human being, team or organization is the level of belief possessed in their own abilities to cause or bring about an outcome. Bandura's work around self-efficacy, understanding how our thoughts and words affect our belief to accomplish our goals, notes that "People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided." (Bandura, A., 1986). "Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the sources of action required to manage prospective situations." (Bandura, A., 1995). Dr. Bandura maintains that "people who regard themselves as highly efficacious act, think, and feel differently from those who perceive themselves as inefficacious. They produce their own future, rather than simply foretell it." (Bandura, A., 1986). Seligman maintains that "Changing the destructive things you say to yourself when you experience the setbacks that life deals all of us is the central skill of optimism." (Seligman, 2011).

Having a growth mindset is a direct result of the positive words we use (our self-talk) to build and affirm our beliefs in our own ability to achieve. "People's beliefs about their abilities have a profound effect on those abilities. Ability is not a fixed property; there is a huge variability in how you perform. People who have a sense of self-efficacy bounce back from failure; they approach things in terms of how to handle them rather than worrying about what can go wrong." (Bandura, A., 1997).

"Mindset and grit are two non-cognitive factors used to predict academic success (Duckworth, 2016; Dweck, 2006). Mindset refers to student belief in ability and the malleability of human talent and intelligence (Dweck, 2006). Grit is the ability to persist in long-term goals." (Duckworth, 2016). The presentation "Building Postsecondary Mindset" furthers these points.

The literature points to the development of 'college knowledge' as one important aspect of developing a growth mindset and pathway for student success. "High school and college are two separate worlds, with different historical origins and purposes. Thus, transitioning from high school to college presents challenges.... If new students do not meet others with common interests, feel accepted, and feel like they belong, they won't stay in college (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Tinto, 2012)." (Oliveri, C., Funke, K., Clark, J., Seifert, 2018). Chenoweth & Galliher (2004) found that rural Appalachian students struggled with a lack of information about college in general, along with more specific information regarding financial aid. (Oliveri, C., Funke, K., Clark, J., Seifert, 2018). One way to assist students to decode higher education's hidden curriculum is by developing their college knowledge (Ardoin, 2013; Smith, 2013; Tierney et al., 2013). Researchers have found academic skill and innate intelligence are not the only, and often not the most important, indicators of whether a student will persist in the classroom. "Non-cognitive factors are non-academic, or psychological, factors that affect student learning and can include students' feelings about their abilities and school" (Dweck et al., 2014).

The importance of making what is invisible visible can be tied to creating an intentional and perhaps new, picture of success. "Beyond the formal academic curriculum lies higher education's 'hidden curriculum,' which Smith (2013) defines as "the unwritten, norms, values, and expectations that unofficially and implicitly govern the interactions among students, faculty, professional staff, and administrators" (p. 3). Once students arrive on the college campus, they encounter the hidden curriculum as it manifests in different, albeit rarely explicitly stated expectations, attitudes, and behaviors. (Oliveri, C., Funke, K., Clark, J., Seifert, 2018).

"Noncognitive factors have emerged as essential traits for students to possess in order to achieve in academia (Blackwell et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2016; Duckworth et al., 2007; Dweck, 2006). There are two types of mindsets, fixed and growth and all people can have a combination of the two. The dominant mindset can depend on situations and circumstances and can be changed by various factors (Dweck, 2006; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015)." (Slone, 2020).

"Programs such as new student orientation, first-year experience seminars, and other first-year programming may address the "college knowledge" needed for a successful transition, but not all students take part, not all colleges offer these services, their foci differ (Young & Hopp, 2014), and they occur after a student is already enrolled and attending college. In light of such uncertain student engagement and variation in programming, it seems logical that in order to prepare college-ready students, some college knowledge needs to be developed prior to matriculation." (Oliveri, C., Funke, K., Clark, J., Seifert, 2018).

Rural students who perceive themselves to be high achievers also self-report strong social skills, parental involvement, and peer involvement. Rural students who report a lower achieving self-perception also report that they rank lower in economic categories such as free or reduced lunch qualifications (Hoffman, Anderson-Butcher, Fuller, & Bates, 2015). Rural students place a high amount of value on place and relationships, particularly family relationships (Hendrickson, 2012; Hlinka, 2017)." (Slone, 2020).

Focus Group participants noted that:
Some students come from a fixed mindset and lack a good grasp of the possibilities that could be. Having perhaps grown up in families experiencing intergenerational poverty, with limited resources, and limited support for pursuing higher education, some of these students lacked a growth mindset.

Conclusion

Central to this literature review, including the necessity of understanding the rural Appalachian student experience, is deepening and challenging perspectives of the individual, educational and institutional conditions that must be paid attention to collectively, in order to achieve the desired vision of success for students in the Appalachian region. Synthesizing the information gathered from various resources identified, led to the focusing on seven key areas: (1) the student experience and (2) its intersection with the digital divide, (3) the impact of personal bonds, (4) locally relevant curriculum, (5) rural educational support, (6) institutional partnerships, and finally examining (7) "a growth mindset". These seven themes serve as key drivers to student success. These themes, along with the established core competencies, will be the foundation of the Rural Educators' Academy's pilot curriculum and will keep us focused on radically reimagining educational equity in action.

The literature review supports the need to pilot a professional development program to enhance the skills of faculty, staff, and leaders at CCA member colleges to understand, respond to, and be proactive to the needs, assets, and lived experiences of the rural student population that they serve. Through this evaluation process, our perspective has been

broadened by the literature review, both of theoretical and applied knowledge. We understand the context under which we are engaging in this work and the opportunity for collaboration through aligned regional efforts that support student success and excellence in the Appalachian region, and more specifically, in the communities of our CCA member communities.

Building off the body of evidence and experience described in the literature review and in the first-person accounts from our educational and community stakeholders, the next stage of this pilot period will examine the key themes that the literature has identified being critical to increasing rural student success. Educational leaders, faculty, staff, and community members effectively increase student success outcomes in the Appalachian region and perhaps even more importantly build and strengthen the capacities and core competencies of educational professionals to analyze, reflect and act.

The Rural Educator Academy is specifically designed to empower the leaders, staff, faculty and community members to develop the skills to engage the youth, high school graduates, non-traditional students and any other community members who will look to the local community college as an entry-point into the local workforce. Below are just a few of the outcomes that have been identified by current member institutions of the Community Colleges of Appalachia.

- Provide access to wifi connectivity and technology which is consistently shared as an infrastructure and financial challenge
- Build and maintain strong ties between the colleges and the local community
- Address family culture as a strength and a challenge for rural student interest, engagement and matriculation
- Define and deepen the understanding of the overall rural student experience which is essential for leaders, faculty and staff
- Provide resources and support to students both in and outside of the classroom
- Adjust the curriculum to make learning relevant and connect to local industry opportunities
- Increase need for success coaches, tutors, advisors, and mentors to provide an embedded system of support for students
- Assist students to develop confidence and a growth mindset

An extensive list of programs and models can be found in the Appendices. This list of programs and initiatives will serve as a resource for REA participant engagement and discussion for the leaders, faculty, staff and facilitators of the Rural Educator Academy.

The Story Behind the Data

Powerful Observations from Focus Group Participants:

"We are only as successful as our most disproportionately impacted students."

- College Staff Member

"We (the educational system as a whole) need to get rid of this false narrative of 'the traditional college-ready student'! Our job is to meet them (students) where they are at and support their success no matter their background!"   - College President

"I have seen students writing full research papers on their cell phones. I am confident they have the drive to succeed, so I want to do all I can to connect them to the resources they need to ensure their success."   - College Faculty Member

"Midterms and finals are not the (ideal) time to start conversations about tutoring and basic needs. Systems of support should be offered prior to and/or early in the term to ensure we are setting our students up for success."   - College Staff Member

"We go to these conferences and learn all of these new promising practices, then the conversation ends, and we have nowhere to share our success or work through our (programmatic and institutional) challenges. The creation of collaborative spaces may be the key to long-lasting success."   - College Staff

"Our goal is to better evaluate the needs of our community and transition students' family support systems' perspective of higher education from 'an unnecessary financial burden' to an 'opportunity for financial stability and economic growth.'"

- College President

"Establishing course offerings and rotations that are deemed relevant and necessary to the communities we serve is essential for moving the needle on completion (rates) …. Our students' intrinsic motivation can be directly tied to our institution's ability to ensure timely completion."   - College Faculty Member

Methodology

Our methodology is simple: We trust and know our leaders, faculty, staff, community members and students already hold the answers to their most pressing issues concerning the current limits on rural Appalachian student success. We believe that a participatory process engaging all stakeholders with their own vision of student success, provides us with the most critical, relevant, and authentic input into a process and intended outcome.

Evaluation

To facilitate the Community Colleges of Appalachia Rural Educator Academy Pilot evaluation, the curriculum development team collected quantitative and qualitative data through surveys, focus groups and individual interviews and conducted a literature review to better understand the most current research and best practices in the educational realm of rural student success in Appalachia.

Survey

The Rural Educator Academy (REA) survey provided qualitative and quantitative data. The survey was designed to understand the profile of rural students in the Community Colleges of Appalachia and how staff, faculty, and leaders are currently delivering support inside and outside the classroom to improve success for all rural students. For the purposes of this study, we define student success as the holistic development of students as they reach their personal and academic goals in higher education.

The survey was opened on Monday, March 21st, and closed on Monday, April 18th, 2022. The survey was emailed to all college presidents affiliated with the 96 Community Colleges of Appalachia. There were 713 respondents to the survey across 25 colleges.

Because student data was not collected via focus groups (zero students signed up to participate in the focus groups), the quantitative summary data shared will focus on student responses. 150 students participated in the survey across 17 CCA member colleges. The qualitative summary data will focus on the perspectives shared by community members, faculty, leaders, and staff.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Individuals interviewed and groups who took part in the focus group discussions included CCA executive committee members, along with CCA leaders, faculty, staff, and community members provided additional qualitative and quantitative data.

Literature Review

As part of the Literature Review, the most current research was prioritized, sources with a focus toward the Appalachian region, sources highlighting the seven key themes, and the sources outlining the impacts to student success listed in the introduction: issues of equity, high poverty rates and income inequality, low graduation rates, rural culture, obstacles for social and economic mobility, food and basic needs insecurity, fixed mindset, and infrastructure and the roles they play in the educational achievements and student success of students in the Appalachian region.

We also undertook a review of relevant program models, particularly focused in Appalachia, using these same criteria.

As a result of this evaluation process, seven key themes emerged - featured in the Interview and Focus Group Responses and in the Literature Review - will serve, along with the Core Competencies, as the foundational focus in building the REA pilot curriculum.

Core Competencies

The REA Pilot Evaluation process included the completion of the following milestones to identify and develop a set of "Core Competencies" intended to measure and increase cognitive awareness for CCA member leaders, faculty, and staff. The purpose was to identify the root causes of our decision making as individuals and student-success professionals.

Core Competencies Phase 1 - REA Key Milestones
Below is a summary of the evaluation steps taken to draft the preliminary REA core competencies for leaders, staff, and faculty:

- Evaluating the Purpose and Goals of the REA
- Literature Review
- Regional Leader Interviews
- REA Executive Committee Member interviews
- Staff, Faculty, Leader, Community Member & Student Focus Group Administration
- CCA Wide-Evaluation via Survey Monkey for Staff, Faculty, Leader, Community Members & Students

Upon delivery and completion of a hybrid curriculum rooted in this research, each of the REA participants will learn to identify, define, and examine how decisions have and should be made to increase rural Appalachian student success.

Whether at home with our families, with our teams, in our communities, or at our institutions (and just about any place human beings are in charge), our behaviors are formed, and decisions are made by our individual and collective past emotional histories stored at the subconscious level. Another way to define our collective histories is **Culture**. One of the leading voices in the field of culture and psychology, Dr. David Matsumoto, articulated that "Because methodologies themselves are bound by culture every finding is culture-bound until it is formally tested in as wide and diverse an arena as possible. In fact, conducting research is itself a culture-bound enterprise, and not every culture in the world subscribes to this particular method of knowledge creation. Engaging with these issues every day is one of the ultimate examples of critical thinking." (Matsumoto, D., 2002).

The REA participants will begin this journey with in-depth knowledge of how to identify current culture (individually, in their departments/classrooms, in their programs, on their campuses, and in their communities) and will continue to engage in cohorts of their peers (one cohort of leaders and two cohorts of teachers/staff combined) through the Spring 2023 academic term. This will serve as a springboard for each of the participant groups to analyze how and what decisions have been made in the past, evaluate these insights, and decide how they will create a new and equitable culture of success by reimagining what success can and should look like for their rural Appalachian student population.

In Appendix B, the Literature Review of Program Models lists a plethora of network configurations to support rural staff, faculty, and administrators who often wear multiple hats, making the work difficult to navigate. The REA will create safe spaces and common language to accelerate effectiveness and increase student success rates for rural Appalachian students throughout the region.

The review of the literature and the responses provided in the interviews and focus groups presented information which led to the development of the key themes identified in the REA process. These themes, along with the following core competencies, will be foundational in building the REA pilot curriculum.

REA CORE COMPETENCIES

As this collective journey to create equitable cultures of student success for rural Appalachian students, specifically for our Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and students with lower income, begins, the first step is to identify the core competencies to be achieved by the faculty, staff and leader participants.

Following Bloom's Taxonomy to encourage higher-order thought, there are a set of core competencies that all three groups will develop to solidify a "common language" among all participants.

The first set of competencies, titled "Core Competencies," follows the first three levels of behavioral and cognitive learning outcomes. These competencies will provide a common "knowledge, understanding, and application" of cognitive principles among cohorts and students.

The second set of core competencies, titled "Equitable & Cultural Impact (College Core Competencies)" are the learning outcomes derived from the initial surveys, interviews, and focus groups outlining specific areas to be addressed by each group/cohort on their respective campuses.

The achievement of these competencies will foster in-depth analysis, evaluation, and creativity as the REA participants work to create a more equitable culture of rural student success on their campuses and within the CCA.

Core Competencies for All Participants and Facilitators

Upon completion of the REA pilot program, faculty, staff & leaders will be able to*:*
- Examine and discuss the concept of self-efficacy and the value of goals/goal setting in their personal and professional ability to help increase rural student success in and out of the classroom.

- Articulate personal and professional cognitive blind spots to help develop an increase in rural student success in and out of the classroom.

- Define the components of the mind in relation to the root causes of conscious and subconscious decision-making.

- Examine and express their personal and professional understanding of how beliefs are formed.

- Describe habits and attitudes, their importance to accomplishing goals, and how to visualize new habits and attitudes to help increase rural Appalachian student success in and out of the classroom.

- Identify the three dimensions of self-talk (words, pictures, emotions) and describe how self-talk builds belief systems.

- Articulate and develop their own personal and professional plan to form their self-concept and self-image with their own self-talk.

- Define and examine the root causes of culture, discuss what culture is designed to do, and change productivity through this lens.

- Differentiate limiting and liberating habits, attitudes, beliefs, expectations that impact student success for Appalachian rural students.

- Articulate and experiment with the concept of human comfort zones, how they are created, and how they impact human decision-making.

- Explain the importance of building self-esteem and confidence with self and others

- Articulate the elements of the subconscious mind, the four functions of the creative subconscious mind, and the importance of teaching rural Appalachian students how to create and achieve their own image of success.

- Define the guidelines to use in writing effective affirmations to be used personally and professionally to help increase rural Appalachian student success in and out of the classroom.

- Experiment with the use of the affirmation process to expand comfort zones and change attitudes for rural Appalachian students.

- Examine the impact of the collective environmental self-image, how the environmental self-image impacts environmental comfort zones, and how the affirmation process can be used to change both for the benefit of increasing student success rates for rural Appalachian students.

- Identify and discuss the two types of motivation and create an environment where everyone can function with freedom, confidence, and without fear.

- Define the Reticular Activating System (RAS), articulate its role in making decisions, and develop a system to utilize the RAS to help self, team, campus and students increase the success rates of Appalachian rural students.

Equitable & Cultural Impact: College Core Competencies

REA Faculty Core Competencies

Upon completion of the REA*, **faculty participants** will be able to:

- Define, examine, and identify the ideal root causes to a liberated student success experience for Appalachian rural students.

- Collaborate with staff and leaders to structure a success coaching model centered on the rural Appalachian student experience.

- Collaborate with staff and leaders to develop innovative ways to build relationships in the community to increase enrollment among non-traditional students.

- Design and facilitate ways to incorporate the rural student experience into the syllabus/lesson plan to utilize the voices of rural and non-rural students to identify and create ways to increase rural student success.

- Create ways to validate the experience of rural non-traditional students in and out of the classroom.

- Outline and design credential programs specific to local target markets.

- Collaborate with staff and leaders to connect with local elementary, middle, and high schools.

REA Staff Core Competencies

Upon completion of the REA**, REA staff participants** will be able to:

- Define, examine, and identify the ideal root causes to a liberated student success experience for Appalachian rural students.

- Identify and outline the many barriers preventing rural student success, reframe this experience through the lens of equity, and create a plan that centers the rural Appalachian experience throughout the campus student support systems.

- Structure a process that validates the rural Appalachian student experience, increasing the awareness and utilization of student support services in a timely fashion to increase rural Appalachian student success.

- Outline and integrate innovative methods to listen to and learn more about a student's background, needs, and reason for being in school.

- Work with leaders and faculty to negotiate and reorganize how support is provided during off-hours and weekends to increase student success for rural Appalachian students.

- Outline, recommend and integrate new habits, attitudes, beliefs and expectations to increase awareness, empathy, and support for rural Appalachian students from their recruitment process to their graduation and into their career fields or next step in academia.

- (Where possible) formulate opportunities to increase partnerships between the college and community to increase student success for rural Appalachian students.

- Compile a working articulation for prospective, incoming, and current rural Appalachian students outlining the value of student experiences and how these experiences, directly and indirectly, translate into employment.

- Reframe and formulate the ideal picture for supporting mental health and rural students with disabilities.

- Design ways to integrate first-generation college celebrations for rural Appalachian students and their families.

- Design and facilitate ways to incorporate the rural student experience into the programming/ education initiatives to utilize the voices of rural and non-rural students to identify and create ways to increase rural student success.

- Create ways to validate the experience of rural non-traditional students in and out of the classroom.

- Collaborate with faculty and leaders to connect with local elementary, middle, and high schools.

- Structure a process to hear from local manufacturers and industry professionals on what they look for in new employees to incorporate in the support services giving rural Appalachian students advanced insight in professional careers after graduation.

REA Leader Core Competencies

Upon completion of the REA, **REA leader participants** will be able to:

- Define, examine, and identify the ideal root causes to a liberated student success experience for Appalachian rural students.

- Create ways to validate the experience of rural non-traditional students in and out of the classroom.

- Design and facilitate ways to incorporate the rural student experience into policy to utilize the voices of rural and non-rural students to identify and create ways to increase rural student success.

- Collaborate with staff and faculty to connect with local elementary, middle, and high schools.

- Collaborate with staff and faculty to create a rotation for leaders to teach/co-lead the FYE seminar and/or new student orientation.

- Structure a process to hear from local manufacturers and industry professionals on what they look for in new employees to incorporate in the lesson plans giving rural Appalachian students advanced insight in professional careers after graduation.

- Institutionalize a plan for high school graduates with no intention to attend college the opportunity for a condensed educational session series to prepare them for the next steps of enrollment or a life plan.

- Collaborate with staff and faculty to outreach to marginalized groups in the local community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. Ascendium's work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all. For more information, visit https://www.ascendiumphilanthropy.org

The Community Colleges of the Appalachian Region (CCA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and a voluntary association of public community colleges serving the common interests of member colleges and their communities through programs and services responsive to the unique cultural, geographic, and economic development challenges facing the region.The Community Colleges of the Appalachian Region does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations. These activities include, but are not limited to, the appointment to and termination from its Board of Directors, hiring and firing of staff or contractors, selection of volunteers, selection of vendors, and providing of services. For more information, visit www.ccofapp.org.

LAUNCH Student Success: Equity Through Student Success
LAUNCH Student Success melds cognitive principles (self-efficacy, self-talk, etc.) with student success concepts (time management, study habits, etc.) to offer the ultimate in a student success curriculum. Understanding the importance of their current habits, attitudes, beliefs and expectations, along with their ability to make positive changes, allows your students to become more effective than they ever thought possible. For more information, visit www.launchstudentsuccess.com.

For more information on the
Community Colleges of Appalachia Rural Educator Academy (REA)
please visit: **www.ccofapp.org/REA**

APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

The Rural Education Academy Core Competencies Survey is designed to understand the profile of a rural student in the Community Colleges of Appalachia and how staff, faculty and leaders are currently delivering support inside and outside the classroom to improve success for all rural students.

For the purposes of this study, we define student success as the holistic development of students as they reach their personal and academic goals in higher education.

1. I believe that all rural students are capable of success, no exceptions.

1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

If you do not strongly agree (5), please explain: _____

2. What do you believe holds rural students back from succeeding at the Community Colleges of Appalachia (mark all that apply):

- Family beliefs
- Limited self-efficacy
- Goal-setting
- Lack of motivation
- Setting priorities
- Time management
- Lack of financial resources
- Lack of college readiness
- Balancing college work and family
- Lack of focus
- Need for assistance and engagement from college staff/faculty
- Lack of supportive friend network
- Stereotype threat
- Discrimination
- Cultural expectations
- Other (please share):

3. Based on the current rural students you work with, how would you rate their self-efficacy (belief in their ability to succeed in a specific situation or in attaining a certain goal)?

1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

- I believe that my rural students are able to achieve most of the goals they set for themselves.

- When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that my rural students will accomplish them.
- I believe that my rural students can obtain outcomes that are important to them.
- I believe my rural students can succeed at almost any endeavor to which they set their mind.
- My rural students are able to successfully overcome many challenges.
- I am confident that my rural students can perform effectively on many different tasks.
- Even when things are tough, my rural students perform quite well.

4. I work with rural students to develop goals.

1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

5. I check in with rural students on their goals.

1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

6. I know what campus resources are available to rural students.

1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

7. I provide campus resources to rural students to help them succeed.

1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

8. As an advisor, I know what rural students on my campus need to be successful.

1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

9. When advising rural students, I feel prepared to assist them with their needs.

1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree

10. What do you see as your role in the success of rural students?

- Addressing curricular barriers to completion
- Redesigning academic and/or nonacademic policies
- Evolving academic advising models
- Enhancing the learning experience
- Flagging signs of rural student risk
- Mentoring rising-risk rural student groups
- Supporting rural students through their nonacademic experiences
- Engaging the community with the campus
- Engaging the campus with the community
- Other (please describe):

11. What do you see as the role of leaders (community college presidents and senior leaders in academic and student affairs) in the success of rural students?

- Addressing curricular barriers to completion
- Redesigning academic and/or nonacademic policies
- Evolving academic advising models
- Enhancing the learning experience
- Flagging signs of rural student risk
- Mentoring rising-risk rural student groups
- Supporting rural students through their nonacademic experiences
- Engaging the community with the campus
- Engaging the campus with the community
- Other (please describe):

12. What do you see as the role of faculty (those charged with delivering instruction) in the success of rural students?

- Addressing curricular barriers to completion
- Redesigning academic and/or nonacademic policies
- Evolving academic advising models
- Enhancing the learning experience
- Flagging signs of rural student risk
- Mentoring rising-risk rural student groups
- Supporting rural students through their nonacademic experiences
- Engaging the community with the campus
- Engaging the campus with the community
- Other (please describe):

13. What do you see as the role of student services staff (those charged with providing co-curricular programming and student support) in the success of rural students?

- Addressing curricular barriers to completion
- Redesigning academic and/or nonacademic policies
- Evolving academic advising models
- Enhancing the learning experience
- Flagging signs of student risk
- Mentoring rising-risk student groups
- Supporting students through their nonacademic experiences
- Engaging the community with the campus
- Engaging the campus with the community
- Other (please describe):Addressing curricular barriers to completion
- Redesigning academic and/or nonacademic policies
- Evolving academic advising models
- Enhancing the learning experience
- Flagging signs of rural student risk
- Mentoring rising-risk rural student groups
- Supporting rural students through their nonacademic experiences
- Engaging the community with the campus
- Engaging the campus with the community
- Other (please describe):

14. What do you see as the role of community members in the success of rural students?

- Addressing curricular barriers to completion
- Redesigning academic and/or nonacademic policies
- Evolving academic advising models
- Enhancing the learning experience
- Flagging signs of rural student risk
- Mentoring rising-risk rural student groups
- Supporting rural students through their nonacademic experiences
- Engaging the community with the campus
- Engaging the campus with the community
- Other (please describe):

15. What makes rural students in Appalachia unique in comparison to rural students in other areas?

- **Elicited an open ended response**

Please respond to the following demographic questions:

Your role in the community:
- Leaders (community college presidents and senior leaders in academic and student affairs)
- Faculty (those charged with delivering instruction)
- Staff (those charged with providing co-curricular programming and student support)
- Community Partner
- Student

Gender: How do you identify?
- Man
- Non-binary
- Woman
- Prefer to self-describe: _____

How long have you worked at the Community Colleges of Appalachia?
- 0-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16 years or more

Which CCA member college are you associated with?

- Alfred State College
- Allegany College of Maryland
- Asheville-Buncombe Tech. Comm. College
- Ashland Comm. and Tech. College
- Athens Technical College

- Belmont College
- Bevill State Community College
- Big Sandy Community Technical College

- Blue Ridge Community and Technical College

- Blue Ridge Community College
- BridgeValley Community and Technical College
- Butler County Community College
- Calhoun Community College
- Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute
- Catawba Valley Community College
- Chattahoochee Technical College
- Chattanooga State Community College

- Cleveland State Community College
- Columbia State Community College
- Community College of Allegany County

- Community College of Beaver County

- Corning Community College
- Dabney S. Lancaster Community College
- East Mississippi Community College

- Eastern Gateway Community College

- Eastern WV Community & Technical College
- Forsyth Technical Community College

- Gadsden State Community College
- Garrett College
- Georgia Northwestern Technical College
- Greenville Technical College
- Gwinnett Technical College
- H. Councill Trenholm State Community College
- Haywood Community College
- Hazard Community & Technical College
- Hocking College
- Ingram State Technical College
- Isothermal Community College
- Itawamba Community College
- J. F. Drake State Community & Tech College
- Jamestown Community College
- Jefferson State Community College
- Kentucky Comm. & Tech. College System

- Lanier Technical College
- Lawson State Community College
- Mayland Community College
- Maysville Community & Technical College
- McDowell Technical Community College
- Motlow State Community College
- Mountain Empire Community College

- Mountwest Community & Technical College
- National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship
- New River Community College
- North Georgia Technical College
- Northampton Community College
- Northeast Alabama Community College
- Northeast MS Community College
- Northeast State Community College
- Northwest Mississippi Community College
- Northwest-Shoals Community College

- Patrick Henry Community College
- Pellissippi State Community College
- Pennsylvania Highlands Community College
- Pierpont Community Technical College

- Rio Grande Community College
- Roane State Community College
- Shelton State Community College
- Snead State Community College
- Somerset Community College
- Southeast KY CTC
- Southern State Community College
- Southern Union State Community College
- Southern WV Community & Technical College
- Southwest Virginia Community College

- Southwestern Community College
- Spartanburg Community College
- SUNY Broome Community College
- Surry Community College
- Tennessee Board of Regents

- Tri-County Community College
- Tri-County Technical College
- Virginia Community College System
- Virginia Highlands Community College

- Wallace State Community College
- Walters State Community College
- Washington State Community College

- West Georgia Technical College
- West Virginia Northern Community College

- West Virginia University at Parkersburg

- Western Piedmont Community College

- Westmoreland County Community College
- Wilkes Community College
- Wytheville Community College
- Zane State College

Focus Group Questions

Q1: What are the Community Colleges of Appalachia doing well to support student success?

Q2: In what specific areas of student success can the Community Colleges of Appalachia do better?

Q3: What suggestions do you have for addressing these specific areas of student success?

Q4: As our team works to develop a Rural Educator Academy, what key areas of professional development would be most valuable to you?

Q5: Is there anything else you would like to share that you did not already?

Interview Questions

This time has been reserved to gain a clearer understanding of what defines a rural student in the Appalachian region, and to gain cultural and historical context to establish best practices, a framework, and a methodology for the Rural Educators Academy.

- What areas would you say are most important to improve rural success outcomes on your campus?
- What would yield sustained improvement on your campus?
- Please describe what ideal change (at the institutional level and course level) look like for your campus?
- Where have you seen positive communities of practice across Appalachia?
- What would you say are some of the benefits of your region for an Appalachian rural student?
- What are some of the challenges of your region?

- How would you describe the cultural, geographic, and economic challenges (opportunities) facing the Appalachian region?
- "But too often in rural Appalachia the respective college's administration, faculty, and staff fail to grasp the breadth and depth of issues confronting low income, underserved individuals" (quote from RFP for Rural Educator Academy). In your opinion, what would you say leads to this failure?
- What is your ideal picture of "persistence" & "completion" for the CCA/Region/Campus?
- In your ideal world, what policies would you like to see changed or created? (region/campus)
- In your ideal world, how would you like to see resources allocated? (region/campus)
- Please describe how you have seen poverty and rurality influence the mindsets of low-income students?
- How have you seen poverty and rurality disproportionately affect students of color?
- What are some areas where you have seen systemic change resulting in improved student outcomes, and what were the elements/characteristics that were instrumental to that change happening?
- The REA will lead to the following improved rural student outcomes:
  - o Persistence
  - o Course completion
  - o Graduation
  - o Gainful employment
  What do you see when all these increases are happening on your campus?

APPENDIX B

Literature Review: Program Models

As part of the Literature Review, we explored various program models. Descriptive content for each program has been pulled directly from their website or other published collateral.

Aspen Institute
https://www.aspeninstitute.org/impact-report/impact-report-2020/higher-ed-at-the-highest-level/
The College Excellence Program began the Aspen Presidential Fellowship for Community College Excellence in 2015 to prepare aspiring community college presidents to lead with a focus on student success and equity. Each year, 40 leaders in education participate in 10 months of seminars and mentoring with great success: Forty-five fellows have been appointed presidents. This has led to new investments, enabling the College Excellence Program to launch the New President's Fellowship, which supports presidents in their first years of leadership.

The program also collaborates with state educational systems, including partnering with North Carolina State University on a doctoral program in community college leadership, working with the Partnership for College Completion to train Illinois college administrators to achieve equitable student outcomes, and partnering with California's community colleges on a series of workshops for trustees.

The Presidential Fellowship is also diversifying the field. Of the Institute fellows leading community colleges, 52 percent are people of color, compared with 29 percent nationwide. And 53 percent are women, compared with 36 percent nationwide. Even the US deputy assistant undersecretary for community colleges, Casey Sacks, is a fellowship alum.

Defining Student Success:
"To advance student outcomes, community college leaders need to develop a strong understanding of what student success means to them and how they can assess institutional progress against that definition."

Achieving the Dream
https://achievingthedream.org
The community colleges we work with are distinct: They choose transformation over tradition, curiosity over inaction, innovation over status quo. Achieving the Dream is dedicated to being the trusted partner community colleges seek to better connect the academic, social, and operational dots. We provide institutions with integrated, tailored support for every aspect of their work — from foundational capacities such as leadership, data, and equity to intentional strategies for supporting students holistically, building K-12 partnerships, and more.

Accelerating Student Completion: Encouraging New Dreams (ASCEND)
https://www.wvup.edu/ascend/
West Virginia University Parkersburg's Accelerating Student Completion: Encouraging New Dreams (ASCEND) is a program created to help more students earn certificates and associate degrees within

three years by offering our Riverhawks personal and academic support. Funded by a grant from Arnold Ventures, ASCEND replicates the successful Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) at City College of New York (CUNY). ASAP was able to double their graduation rates with individualized course schedules, required full-time study, comprehensive and personalized and career development services. Financial incentives include waivers of tuition and mandatory fees for financial aid-eligible students who have a gap between their financial aid award and tuition, assistance to reduce (or eliminate) the cost of textbooks, and costs to travel to campus.

ASCEND supports students by including comprehensive and personal advising, career counseling, tutoring, waivers for tuition and mandatory fees for students that demonstrate financial need, Kroger gift cards for groceries and/or gas, and additional financial assistance to defray the cost of textbooks. ASCEND also offers special class scheduling options to ensure that ASCEND students get the classes they need, are in classes with other Ascend students, and attend classes in convenient blocks of time to accommodate their work schedules. As students approach graduation, they will receive additional assistance to help them transfer to a bachelor's degree program, another four-year college, or transition into the workforce, depending on their goals.

Battelle for Kids / Ohio Appalachian Collaborative (OAC)
https://www.battelleforkids.org/
The OAC is 1 of 19 collaborative networks working in conjunction with Battelle for Kids, and has a specific focus on addressing rural identity, which can be seen through two perspectives: 1) as an attitude that "rural" is a place to leave rather than a place to achieve, and 2) as looking backwards (as it used to be) versus looking forward about what could happen in terms of schools and communities transforming rural economies and rural opportunities for all.

The OAC works from a framework of "The Three Ps for RECs": Place-Based (help their member schools meet local economic, civic or social needs that actually foster rural growth and sustainability; Peer-Based (help member schools overcome geographic and professional isolation for teachers/educators); Pedagogical-Based (helping member schools better understand the students, what their student experience is and how their students can succeed in the global economy even if they decide to stay at home after they graduate).

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS and MODELS

Achieving the Dream
https://achievingthedream.org/

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)
https://www.aacc.nche.edu/

American Talent Initiative (ATI)
https://americantalentinitiative.org/
> Accelerating Opportunity campaign - mobilizing members to pledge to public, aspirational goals related to increasing lower-income student enrollment:

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)
https://www.arc.gov/

Aspen Institute: College Excellence Program
https://www.aspeninstitute.org/impact-report/impact-report-2020/higher-ed-at-the-highest-level/

Battelle for Kids / Ohio Appalachian Collaborative
https://www.battelleforkids.org/

Bridges Out of Poverty
https://www.ahaprocess.com/our-model/

Community College Research Center
https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/

EAB (formerly the Education Advisory Board)
https://eab.com/

Every Student Succeeds Act
https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

Institute of Education Sciences - Regional Educator Laboratories (REL)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHXFaFM5SRs

Matriculate
https://www.matriculate.org/about-matriculate

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)
https://www.nacacnet.org/

National Association of Community Colleges (NACCE)
https://www.nacce.com/

National Center for Inquiry and Improvement (NCII)
https://ncii-improve.com/

National Rural Educators Association (NREA)
https://www.nrea.net/

Ohio Association of Community Colleges
https://ohiocommunitycolleges.org/

Remake Learning
https://remakelearning.org/

Rural Scholars Program - Univ. of Iowa
https://now.uiowa.edu/2019/07/first-year-rural-scholars-research

Rural Schools Collaborative
https://ruralschoolscollaborative.org/

Vermont Rural Partnership: A Grassroots Coalition of Vermont Small Schools
https://vtruraledu.org/

Northwest Rural Innovation and Student Engagement (NW RISE) Network convenes teachers and leaders from some of the Northwest's most isolated and remote communities to learn from one another, share strategies to meet their unique challenges, and spread best practices of the region's rural schools.
https://reg17cc.educationnorthwest.org/nw-rise

APPENDIX C

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Aspen Institute - College Excellence Program: Improving Labor Market Outcomes
https://collegeexcellencecurriculum.aspeninstitute.org/module/improving-labor-market-outcomes/

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