



Rural Youth  
Catalyst

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***Young People—Rural America's Most Valuable Resource***

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# Rural Youth Catalyst:

- Change popular perception of rural and Native young people
- Build the leadership and representation of rural and Native youth and youth practitioners at regional and National level.
- Strengthen the capacity of local practitioners to design programs to meet the needs of rural and Native young people.
- Identify and disseminate strong practices resulting in the best outcomes for rural and Native young people.
- Pilot innovative solutions to persistent barriers that can be replicated across rural communities.
- Change the indicators used to measure what success looks like for rural young people and their communities.
- Influence and shape policy to meet the needs of rural and Native youth.

# Objectives for Session: K-12 and Larger Workforce

- Rural Context and Consideration—Launching Point for Cohort Conversations
- Center the Needs of Rural Youth Including Opportunity Youth
- Work Based Learning/Pathways in a Rural Context—Challenges and Opportunities
- Call for Collaboration-Engaging Employers
- Quick Examples
- Resources

## Audience Questions

What Do You Value About Your Rural Community?

What Worries You Most About Your Rural Community?

# K-12 And the Larger Workforce System

Are We Preparing Our Young People to Leave  
or  
Are We Focused on Retention and Return?

# Retention and Return of Our Young People

Rural young people remain in or return to rural communities when they feel a strong sense of connection and belonging

But, 60% of rural young people live in a civic desert  
(CIRCLE, Tufts University, 2022)

## Retention and Return of Our Young People

When We Connect Rural Young People to  
a World of Work,  
We Connect Them To Their Communities

# Retention and Return of Our Young People

- Rural young people need to see themselves in a rural world of work
- Their understanding is only as broad as the adults in their lives
- Need to create opportunities and on-ramps that are consistent and continuous across K-12 and transition to adulthood

# Rural Youth: Current Realities

- Pandemic disruptions to opportunities outside the classroom
- Academic losses
- Mental health crisis
- PSE Impacts

# Rural Opportunity Youth: Current Realities

**Pre-Pandemic:** majority of opportunity youth were in rural communities (a little over 20% of young people)

**Pandemic:** 4.6 million opportunity youth in 2018 to 6.1 million in 2021 (Measure for America)

# Rural Opportunity Youth: Current Realities

- 9<sup>th</sup> grade is the average grade/age that students leave/drop out of school
- Average literacy level is 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Average numeracy level is 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Majority of middle skill, career pathway curriculums require a 9<sup>th</sup> grade level

## Rural Opportunity Youth: Current Realities

Program design is focused on short timelines, quick on-ramps and credentials

Not enough time to develop the foundational, 21<sup>st</sup> century work readiness skills

## Rural Youth: Current Realities

**Trauma Informed Practice** is integral to career pathway development and workforce training

Strengthens student's academic and work readiness skills

# Rural Work Based Learning Environment

- **Exposure, Exploration**—job shadow, employer conversations and visits, alumni conversations, project-based learning
- **Focused Career Pathway Engagement**—internships, pre-apprenticeships, linked learning, “job site” projects.
- **Experience**—specific career pathway training, apprenticeship, Longer internships
- **Across Each Level- Build PSE linkages**—why additional credentials are valuable and what I can do with them

# Rural Work Based Learning: Moving Beyond The Classroom Walls

- Developmentally aligned with the needs of young people
- Create across K-12 and out of school youth
- Allows young people to imagine a themselves in a world of work and in their community
- Build 21<sup>st</sup> century work readiness skills and handle adverse experiences
- First job and first “fail” experiences

# Rural WBL: Moving Beyond the Classroom Walls

Requires collaboration across the education, employer, and workforce systems

# Rural Work Based Learning: Challenges

## **Labor Market Data, High Growth Industries:**

- Don't easily have a range of industry clusters that are present and can limit a young person's ability to explore and reflect
- Virtual career exploration tools don't include rural and reference metro areas 4 or more hours away
- Doesn't take into consideration range of small businesses, self-employment that are present in rural
- Schools offer specific pathway training that doesn't align with needs of community

## Rural Work Based Learning: Challenges

### **Extraction Economies:**

Balance between the dominant industry and new emerging industries and opportunities

# Rural Work Based Learning: Challenges

## **Transportation:**

High School and Alternative Training Programs

Tech Centers—often regional

Employers

PSE Opportunities

Work

# Rural Work Based Learning: Challenges

## **Virtual Learning:**

Broadband infrastructure challenges for rural communities and schools including cell service

Doesn't replace in person learning—challenges for young people to stay engaged

# Rural Work Based Learning: Challenges

## **Limited Funding Opportunities:**

School districts feel pressure grab funds for programming that doesn't provide enough money for work-based learning and employer engagement

# Rural Work Based Learning: Challenges

## **Transitional Life Skills for Rural Young People:**

- Not yet ready to go to where the work or training opportunity is located-often several hours away
- Requires range of resources

# Rural Work Based Learning: Challenges

- Schools focus on trying to maintain the pathway curriculum and sometimes credential
- Getting staff CTE certified for the particular curriculum/course offering
- Results don't match the needs of young people-low completion, placement, retention

# Rural Work Based Learning: Challenges

- Need to create flexible, transferable skills and credentials for young people
- Need to develop opportunities for all students
- Burden is on schools to find employers and connect beyond classroom walls
- Perceived competition across HS, Tech Centers, Community Colleges, Education/Workforce Training Programs

# Rural Work Based Learning: Opportunities

## **Rural Schools:**

- Center of rural communities
- Major employer
- Rural employers often attended and send their own kids to the school
- Willing and Eager for Collaboration—not a lot of red tape

# Rural Work Based Learning: Opportunities

Connect K-12 and WBL to and across local and regional economic development plans

# Rural Work Based Learning: Opportunities

## **Shared and Aligned Goals Across K-12, Employers, Workforce Systems:**

- See Our Young People Thrive
- Build 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills
- Build Strong Community Ties-Retention and Return

# Rural Work Based Learning: Opportunities

## **Engaging Employers:**

- Identify employers for schools
- Collaborate in design and implementing WBL activities
- Training for employers
- Role of Main Street Employers

# Rural Work Based Learning: Opportunities

## **Bring the Workplace to the Students:**

- Simulated workplaces
- Mobile Labs
- Virtual Employer connections—presentation, 1-1 conversations, activities/project

# Rural Work Based Learning: Opportunities

## **Invite K-12, Youth Practitioners to the Economic Development Tables:**

- Santa Fe YouthWorks Culinary Program
- Randolph County Housing Authority, Elkins, WV Healthcare partnership

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