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Abstract

In the Spring of 2019, the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University launched the National Center for Rural Education Research Networks (NCRERN) with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. This overview describes NCRERN's mission of expanding the use of evidence-based decision-making in rural education and the four types of activities contributing to that mission: a rural research network, overall evaluation of impact of participation in the rural research network, replication evaluations, and supplemental studies.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Rural Education Research Networks

In the Spring of 2019, the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University launched the National Center for Rural Education Research Networks (NCRERN) with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

What is NCRERN?

The National Center for Rural Education Research Networks (NCRERN) was founded to expand the use of evidence-based decision-making in rural education. NCRERN partners with networks of rural school districts to generate and evaluate strategies for improving student outcomes. NCRERN seeks to achieve this goal through several key strategies: facilitating a **rural research network** across New York and Ohio focused on piloting and testing promising strategies; an **evaluation of the overall impact** of participating in the rural research network; the **replication evaluations of interventions found to be effective in NY/OH** in other rural areas across the country; and the contribution of **supplemental studies** to the growing body of research on rural education.

Rural Research Network

NCRERN's rural research network originally included 50 rural school districts across New York and Ohio. This model is grounded in a continuous improvement process designed to support districts through the piloting and testing of interventions within three different focus areas: attendance (2020-21 and 2021-22 school years), postsecondary readiness (2021-22 and 2022-23 school years), and postsecondary entry (2022-23 school year). NCRERN provides partner districts in its rural research network with support to select, pilot, and test interventions using the **Proving Ground (PG) continuous improvement process** (see reverse). This continuous improvement process creates a framework for partner districts to use data to understand challenges, identify potential solutions (interventions), design and plan discrete interventions, and use rapid-cycle evaluation to determine the effectiveness of and next steps for the interventions. In the PG continuous improvement process, rapid-cycle is defined as giving school leaders results with enough time to decide to scale up, revise and re-test, or discontinue the intervention for the following school year.
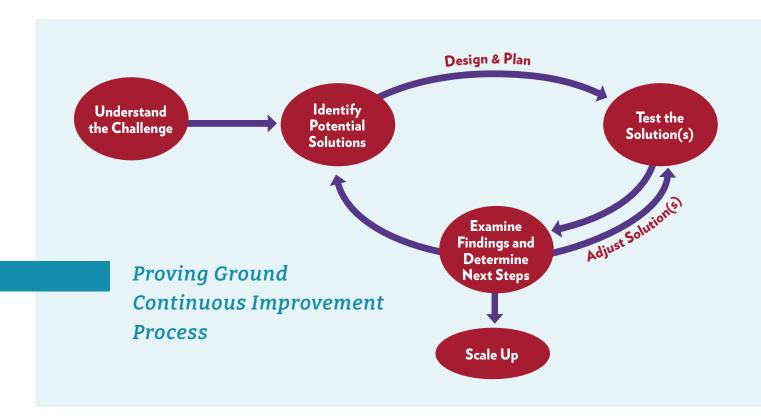
Overall Evaluation

The overall evaluation measures the impact of participation in NCRERN's rural research network. NCRERN will compare the change in outcomes in the participating districts/schools and the comparison districts/schools with similar demographic makeup and prior trends on outcomes of interest.

Replication Evaluation

The replication evaluation will test the impact of the interventions which proved effective in the New York and Ohio rural research network. Interventions will be replicated with rural districts in other rural areas across the country to determine if interventions are still effective when implemented in different rural settings.

Supplemental Studies

NCRERN will contribute studies to the growing body of research on rural education. Studies may further explore NCRERN's focus areas of attendance, postsecondary readiness, and postsecondary entry, as well as other topics relevant to the rural education field.

Proving Ground Continuous Improvement Process

Understand the Challenge → Identify Potential Solutions → **Design & Plan** → Test the Solution(s) → **Adjust Solution(s)** → Examine Findings and Determine Next Steps → Scale Up