Rural Connect: Abstract

North East Florida Educational Consortium, a consortium of small, rural LEAs, will partner with two additional rural consortia in the State–Panhandle Area Educational Consortium and Heartland Educational Consortium–to implement, refine, and test the effectiveness of **Rural Connect**, an **Early-Phase** project addressing **Priority 1: Demonstrates a Rationale** and **Priority 2: Field-Initiated Innovations-General.** Rural Connect is a solution for empowering rural educators as advocates in their professional learning, giving voice and choice to teachers who otherwise operate in isolation from their peers. Through a network of regional learning communities focused on integrating literacy into content-area curriculum, Rural Connect provides a platform for cross-district, teacher-led learning and practice-connected support that is crucial to the growth and retention of educators in small, rural districts. Initial research has shown promising evidence of effectiveness, suggesting that Rural Connect impacts student learning through its more immediate effects on teacher motivation and efficacy.

The project employs a Quasi-Experimental Design **meeting WWC Standards with Reservations** to assess the impact of Rural Connect in achieving three goals: (1) Increase achievement of high-need rural students; (2) Increase collective efficacy and motivation of rural teachers; and (3) Refine a replicable model for rural professional learning and support. Florida's rural consortia serve **high-need students** (economically disadvantaged, academically low-performing) in **29 LEAs**. Rural Connect will serve nearly **15,000** of these students through intervention with **800 K-12** teachers across four experimental cohorts and a waitlist comparison group. The project has the support of the Florida Department of Education, University of Florida, University of North Florida, and other state and national organizations committed to sustaining and expanding the project.