

Department of Education and Jobs for the Future

Transcript of Webinar

Utilizing the Village: Building Community Support for Dropout Prevention and Recovery in Rural Communities

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BRIAN KEATING: I'm going to turn things over to Christina Weeter, from the Department of Education. Christina, take it away.

CHRISTINA WEETER: Thanks, Brian, and welcome everyone to our webinar today. We are just going to quickly go over the goals for this webinar, which is the first in a series of three on rural dropout prevention and recovery.

So we're going to start talking about the size and the scope of the dropout problem in rural communities. We'll present some information on the assets and challenges related to the work in these communities and gather additional assets and challenges from you participants that will inform our next two webinars.

We also are going to be making the case that rural dropout prevention and recovery efforts really do require full community and partner support, and we're going to provide you with some examples of a successful, community-wide effort and some practical advice and tools that you can also use to lead some in your communities.

We will also be underscoring the importance of having a strong system in place to identify struggling students and students returning to school, and provide effective and coordinated interventions to support them in working towards graduation. And finally, we'll be providing a context and building interest for the subsequent webinars on this topic that will focus on effective early interventions and recovery programming.

MR. KEATING: All right. And many of you have already done this, but if you haven't yet, go ahead now and type in the name of your organization, your location, and how many people are attending with you today.

While we do that, I'm going to ask you to respond to a quick poll that you should see popping up on your screen. We would like to know what your professional role is. So for instance, if you are in the classroom, you're going to click the radio button next to that. You might be a district-level or state-level personnel. You might be involved in school administration. You might be a community stakeholder.

Or you might be something else. And if you are – and I see a number of you are some other professional role – if you could just type into the chat what that role is, that'll help us to kind of get a better sense of who's joining us today.

And I see that Kimberly's (sp) a graduations coach. And we've got some other – truancy officer. Thanks everybody for letting us know there. We'll give you a few more seconds if you haven't already voted. Looks like most of you have. But please go ahead and make a selection on the screen right now if you haven't yet voted in that poll, and then we're going to go ahead and move on.

Before we do, I just want to remind you that we are recording today's webinar. We're going to be making that webinar recording and a written transcript available in a couple of business days, so just be on the lookout for that. Also, there were several resources. If you logged in early to

the webinar today you should have been able to download those resources. We can also bring those back up on the screen, so you can go ahead and download those as well. And they'll be available at the end of the webinar, as well.

So you have several resources that we're going to be referencing, and you'll be able to come back and watch this again if you want to review it afterwards. And again, I'm available at any point if you'd like any assistance, technically speaking. I'm here throughout. You can let me know if you need something thought that chat.

But without any further ado, I'm going to turn things back over to Christina Weeter from the U.S. Department of Education to kick things off. Christina, take it away.

MS. WEETER: Thank you, Brian.

So first I'd like to give a bit of context for our discussion today. Let me move ahead to the next slide.

We know there are 9.6 million students in our rural schools, with 3.4 million of these in rural high schools. And this comprises about 20 percent of students. And it doesn't often get enough recognition that this is a substantial portion of our student population – one-fifth of our students.

Furthermore, enrollment in rural schools is growing at a faster rate than all other places combined. One in four rural students is a child of color and one in eight has changed residences in the past 12 months, so this is also a highly mobile population. When we talk about dropouts, it tends to be in the urban areas that garner the most attention, but one in four rural students don't graduate from high school and we know that rural schools don't get enough attention when it comes to this issue. So this webinar series is one effort to address this discrepancy.

So we're here to talk today and hear from you about the special considerations for rural districts when it comes to dropout prevention and recovery.

In this slide, you'll see a map where there is a – it shows sort of the lay of the land when we're thinking of rural districts. So there are 800 rural districts at the highest student poverty rate nationally, and these are sometimes referred to as the “Rural 800”. Seventy-seven percent of the “Rural 800” districts and 87 percent of the students in them are in 15 southern and southwestern states. And you can see that displayed on the map.

So we also know that in these districts 61 percent of students graduate compared to 67 percent in non-rural districts. So we're going to be looking at how efforts – how some efforts that are taking place in order to address these low graduation rates in two of these states that are part of these 15 states related to the “Rural 800”.

So I do want to give you a little bit of information about the Department of Education's work on this area. Improving graduation rates is an important focus of the administration. Our high school graduation initiative is one discretionary grant program that specifically targets reducing

dropout rates and increasing graduation rates through dropout prevention, and also re-engaging those students who've already left school and encouraging them to come back and graduate.

So we have 29 grantees in our HSGI program. Two of these are states, but most of our HSGI grantees are local education agencies. And you can see on the chart that 13 percent of these are rural. So while this webinar series is being done in connection with our HSGI grant work, the topic we're discussing today clearly is more far-reaching than this singular grant program. And it's evidenced by the overwhelming registration response we've received for this event.

So at this point I'm going to hand it over to Terry Grobe, who's going to tell you more about the technical working group that informed the development of this webinar series.

TERRY GROBE: Thank you, Christina. And good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Terry Grobe, and our organization, Jobs for the Future, located here in Boston, is contracted through the Department of Ed to help the Education Department develop and deliver this rural webinar series that's focused on dropout prevention and recovery work; and also to provide technical assistance to the high school graduation initiative grantees.

So to begin the work of developing this webinar, we actually started this fall by assembling a technical working group to advise on the content for the rural webinar series. It was a very interesting group. The representatives included staff from national constituency organizations like the National Education Association and the Rural School and Community Trust.

We also had state department of education staff from a number of states that had been overseeing dropout prevention and recovery work, especially the development of early warning systems, which I'll talk about briefly near the end of the webinar; and also local leaders, superintendents, principals, directors of area foundations, and a number of others with interest and experience in dropout-related issues.

And we began work with a really interesting conversation on the unique nature of rural communities, and also a recognition of how diverse rural areas are. We talked about how easy it is to talk about urban communities or suburban communities and rural communities and kind of lump them in the same basket; but that rural communities are so diverse.

At the same time, there are I think in common a number of assets in rural communities that actually make dropout prevention and recovery efforts easier than they might be in large cities. And there are also constraints and challenges that make the work more difficult.

And so I wanted to start by sharing what this group told us because I thought they gave us some great information. And I'd like to add that this information really resonated with me, because although I've spent 40 years in the Boston area and doing the bulk of my dropout prevention work in urban areas, I grew up in rural Nebraska. I'll just say a quick hi to my compatriots in Nebraska; I see there are a couple of people signed up. So this really resonated with me. I'm back there every once in a while. But I've also seen the ways in which rural communities have

changed over time for any number of reasons. And I suspect that these points will resonate with you as well.

So the group really said that the access in rural communities, the main ones that they saw, is that the community resources are known. These are small towns and communities – the resources might be limited but they're well known. It's not like a city where you say, oh, gee, here's a great resource and I never heard of it.

And partnership work is very natural. People work together to solve problems. One working group member noticed that it's almost in the DNA of rural communities, that people work together well. In schools or in youth programs, the staff knows students and families well. And so there are lots and lots of outside circumstances that teachers in urban areas might have no idea about that staff in rural schools know well. They know the whole student perhaps better than staff in urban communities might.

And that there's lots of community conversation just facilitated day by day and month by month by lots and lots of local networks and meeting places. People talk about these issues regularly and they work together to solve them.

On the other hand, there are a number of challenges. There are very limited resources in many rural communities. The decreasing local tax base means that there's sometimes no funding for schools. There's sometimes difficulty attracting or keeping highly-trained staff in schools. Family can be very geographically isolated, which doesn't help students with the social capital they need to be successful in schools.

And as they may move from small local schools to large consolidated schools, this may pose challenges. They may be going to schools or high schools that are larger than their home community. And that as young people get better educated, they move away from their home communities to seek employment, but they don't stay in their home communities and bring that resource into the places where they grew up.

So we thought these were a really good opening list of assets and challenges, but we're interested in hearing more from the folks who are on the phone with us today. And so we wanted to put up a chat box – Brian, you can help me with this – and to encourage you just for the next minute or so to give us your sense of other assets – what makes the work easier in rural communities – or challenges – what makes it more difficult to do dropout prevention and recovery work. And if you want to add a quick idea about how you capitalized on the opportunities or how you've tried to address the challenges, you can do that, too.

So I'm just going to pause here for a little bit and see what we get as people add to this beginning list. And I also wanted to let people know that we're going to put the responses into a file and leave the window open for about a half hour after the webinar is over so you can review anything that we get for responses after the conclusion of this webinar. It looks like multiple attendees are typing.

MR. KEATING: All right. Great. And yep, many of you have already found that chat window. But as you can see, we've kind of switched formats a little bit here, so we'd love to you to respond to that question that you see. And we're going to a couple of times go to specific prompts like this. But you can always ask a question in that chat in the lower-left. We obviously encourage you right now to respond, and many of you are.

MS. GROBE: Wow.

MR. KEATING: And like Terry said, if you like to kind of look over what people are typing, we're going to take what people write and put them into a resource document that you'll be able to access at the end of the webinar. We're going to only spend a few minutes on this today for each of these prompts so we can make sure we can get as much content as possible. But we'll have these responses available for you that you can download and view at more length after the webinar. So feel free to stay with us at the end.

The other thing that Terry said is that we're going to be leaving the webinar open just like this at the end in case you have other responses that you'd like to give us, and also so you can download that document and give us your feedback. So stay with us at the end of the webinar and we'll go ahead and make those resources available to you at that point. (Pause.)

All right. Great. A lot of good responses coming through here.

MS. GROBE: Definitely. Thank you so much for all this rich information. It's just wonderful. (Pause.)

There's so many of these issues, aren't there, that are tied to isolation and maybe lack of opportunity. So I see responses about young people and their families not understanding the opportunities that higher education can bring; at the same time, families being afraid that if their children go on to college they'll leave their communities and their families. Hard to see the value of education if you don't see it operating in your own life, if you're not sure of the job opportunities close to home. Lots of issues related to smallness and sometimes to isolation and poverty.

So I think we might go ahead – shall we move on, Brian?

MR. KEATING: Sure. So we'll just give everyone a few seconds. If you're still typing in this big chat window, we're going to ask you to go ahead and complete your thought. We're going to go ahead and transition back to the slides in just a moment.

But like we said, we'll be taking a couple of breaks throughout the webinar to ask you open-ended questions like this. Keep in mind you can always give us your thoughts through that main chat when we are looking at the slides, and we are going to be taking these responses and compiling them so you can read them after the fact as well.

But right now, we're going to go ahead and go back to the slides. And I will turn things back to Terry.

MS. GROBE: Thank you very much. And again, thank you, everyone, for being so interactive on that first chat. We'll also have time for questions at the end of both of our presentations today and hope we'll be able to foster some interactivity in that way, too.

So as we consider all of these assets that make rural communities rich and make this work effective as well as sometimes being sobered by the challenges, we wanted to start our first presentation today with a real success story. This is a community in South Texas that has, with new leadership and some considerable community mobilization and the development of some new education options, really made a dent in their dropout rate over the last several years.

The district is the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo School District in South Texas. And today we have two representatives from that district, Linda Carrillo and Arianna Vazquez-Hernandez, from the district. And they are going to talk about the ways in which the superintendent and school district helped to mobilize the district to bring dropouts back to school, and again, all of the efforts and the ways that those efforts work together to really impact their dropout rate.

So I'd like to welcome them. When we first heard this presentation in the technical working group, everyone was so heartened by the work; thought it was work that really was effective in a rural district and took advantage of all the assets that we've mentioned and that you've shared with us.

So welcome, Linda and Arianna. Thank you so much for joining us. And I'm going to turn the program over to you.

ARIANNA VAZQUEZ-HERNANDEZ: Great. Thank you so much. This is Arianna, and good afternoon, everyone. I'm here with Linda Carrillo. She is our principal of our College, Career and Technology Academy, which is our dropout recovery campus. So I'll give you some information about our district, some background.

We are a tri-city school district in South Texas, literally about seven miles from the border with Mexico. We do have obviously about 99 percent Hispanic population and we do have a high economically disadvantaged student body.

Back in 2007, Dr. Daniel King first started here at PSJA; and one of the things – he was moving from another local district that was a lot smaller. PSJA has over a 32,000-student population; we have over 5,000 employees. And he was coming from a smaller district with about 3,200 students. So he definitely made sure to do a lot of research. He looked at all the data and he looked at anything so he could really learn more about this new district, about PSJA.

And one of the things that he found that really made an impact was the number of dropouts. We had over 500 dropouts a year, and that number was increasing every year. And so one of the first things that he definitely had to tackle was the dropout problem that we were facing. And so one of the things that he realized – because this was in July of '07 – was let's look at the class of 2007; how many do we have there?

And there were several students that had, for one reason or another, missed graduation because of as few as three credit hours. Some of them were missing one or more exit exams. But they weren't missing a lot. They were just missing maybe a couple of hours here and there. And so his mission was, OK, let's bring them back and let's help them graduate and start with that first group. So that's what we did; this where going back into most of the time those fifth-year seniors, they don't want to go back to that same environment where they were not successful.

They may have maybe talked to their peers and had mentioned they had graduated when in fact they didn't. And so that is something that we realized. And so Dr. King wanted to make sure that we had a different setting for them – a setting where it was inviting and they wanted to hopefully come back and finish their credits – all their requirements that they needed to graduate.

So that's where he thought about the college, career and technology academy, which is our dropout recovery campus where we do serve students 18 to 26 years of age – thanks to a House Bill 1137 here in Texas – that provides ADA funding up to the age of 26. So we do have a flexible school day. We understand these students, they've dropped out or they didn't complete high school. A lot of them, they're married; they may have kids; and so we understand that they have to work. And the flexible school day helps with providing them either an option of coming in in the morning in the afternoon.

But the other thing with that, we do have that other alternative campus. But what we wanted to also provide was an incentive for them to come back. We needed them to not just come back and finish their high school requirements and get their high school diploma. We wanted to make sure that they were able to use that time wisely.

And so the way that we decided to do that was we had a huge campaign to bring these kids back, and part of it is utilizing the slogan of "you didn't graduate from high school; start college today." And a lot of people were surprised; they were like, what do you mean? They don't have a high school diploma, they're dropouts, they're not completers; how are they going to start college now?

Through dual enrollment and through the partnership with South Texas College – which is our local community college – we were able to open this campus for the fifth-year seniors and start them up with getting their credits and studying for the tests that they needed to pass, but at the same time providing them that bridge and opportunity to take those college courses and not stay behind.

We used that campaign – we did billboards, brochures; we went door to door. We do have another component that is very powerful, is what we call Countdown to Zero. And what Countdown to Zero is is a door-to-door dropout recovery walk. It really is in the month of September every year. Every Saturday in September we invite all the members in our tri-city community to join us and literally go knock on doors and ask these students, talk to the parents, get to know them, get the reason behind them dropping out, and let them know that we're here to help and that they could come back to a different environment that is better suited for their needs and that we'll make sure that they graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

So like is here in the PowerPoint, we've had city staff, mayors, chief of police; we've had elementary teachers, our superintendent; we've had principals, even students from our high schools – everybody. We have over 300 volunteers every Saturday. And they have really made an impact in our community and has really changed the way – you know, everybody knows we're here as a PSJA family to help each other and make sure that they're moving on to better opportunities.

And now we have Ms. Carrillo talk to you a little more about the partnership and what we do at the college, career and technology academy.

LINDA CARRILLO: Good afternoon.

So the college, career and technology academy does serve students from the ages of 18 to 26 who need five or less credits and who need to pass the exit exam.

One of the things that we've established at our school is that we're not just about a high school diploma. We're really about getting students college-ready, college-connected and college-complete. So the way we're able to do this is we combine credit recovery, high-touch support and early college work through different transitions.

So we really focus on our curriculum and instruction; making sure that we're providing students to go deep with college readiness standards so when they do graduate from CCTA they're college-ready and they're able to succeed in the college environment. So that's one thing that makes our school different. It's really about setting that mindset that college is possible and providing the students with the tools they need to be successful. So that culture that has been established at CCTA really makes our students want to stay connected, focused and complete their high school diploma.

At the same token (sic), we do have a very strong partnership with South Texas College, and through we're able to provide our students a variety of dual enrollment classes that they get to enroll in before they graduate from high school, because that's part of our vision. We want to make sure that every single student has the opportunity to enroll in a dual enrollment and then transition into postsecondary.

So through STC and our partnership, we're able to bus our students to the community college where they're able to experience firsthand what it is to be a college student. And keep in mind you're talking about students who were former dropouts. So really being able to provide our students with the tools, the mindset, the confidence that they need to be successful has proven that our students can make it just like anybody else. So it's not about lowering standards, but it's about making sure that our kids are ready and that they're successful.

Now, we do have a tailored curriculum. Like they mentioned before, we do have a flexible day option. We have child care. So our students have all the resources that they need to be successful. And as we all well know, a lot of times your students come in and they have a lot of social or emotional issues at home. So at CCTA we also try to provide services for that. We do

have a full staff that includes a counselor, a social worker. So we're there to really make sure that our students have everything they need to be successful.

But what makes our school different is that we have that mindset from the get-go that we're going to prepare you not only to graduate with the high school diploma but to get your foot into college. At that same token we also have the transition counselor here at PSJA who services our students. So when our students graduate and transition into college, they're not left alone. They have that transition counselor that provides them that support. So when we're talking about getting students college-complete, our district is really serious about that. So we are providing the resources for our students as well.

If you notice, the CCTA model has been identified as a highly successful model and has been replicated across our state through Senate Bill 975, the statewide dropout recovery bill. And so across Texas other schools are opening up just like ours, and I think that's an advantage for us and our community because our students are very mobile. So they have other places that they can go to in case they were to move or migrate or what have you.

But CCTA being a model has really given us an advantage by providing other school districts around Texas and allowing us to share our best practices with them. Here within the valley we do have a replication network as well and we're able to be the core model campus for those different districts, and we're able to share best practices with them and ensure that the model continues throughout our valley here – our region.

Now, in four and a half years the district recovered and graduated almost 900 students. Our goal is this summer to graduate the 1000th graduate. And once again, you're talking about former dropout students who have proven that with this model and with the different tools that are embedded within the model, they can succeed.

Actual dropouts fell from 485 in 2005-2006, and now this year we only had 42. And if you notice on the next slide, you do have a bar graph where you're able to see the comparison of dropouts. In 2005-2006 PSJA was really hurting the region and the state. We almost had double the number of dropouts.

And as you can see, with the leadership of our superintendent, Dr. Daniel King, and his vision, every year we were able to bring that down. And this part 2009-2010 school year, you'll notice that PSJA only had 1.0, where the region and state were above us. So we're really making great impacts within our community and really within our region because of the replication, where others are learning from us and they're able to take this back to their own communities, as well.

MS. GROBE: Terrific. So I think that I'll turn this over to Christina. Christina, are you going to field some questions from the audience at this point?

MS. WEETER: Hi, Terry. We can ask people to type questions into the chat that are specifically for Linda and Arianna and then we can try to answer as many of them as possible.

MR. KEATING: Yep. I also think we're actually going to transition over now to another open chat, just so we have time. So if anybody's typing into that first chat, if you'd just finish up your thought. We'll move over to the big chat and we'll have a couple of – a minute or two here so you can ask any questions as well.

And as you can see here, we've posted those questions at the top of your screen. So if you could respond to those questions, or like Christina said, anything that you heard in the presentation so far that you'd like addressed at this point, go ahead and type that in now. And I see several are already typing. So that's great. We'll just give you a few seconds to type that out. And as soon as we see –

(Cross talk.)

MS. WEETER: Sorry, Brian. We did get one question – and I apologize because I'm not sure who asked this, and it's a question that we tend to get a lot – there's a question around how CCTA is funded.

MS. VAZQUEZ-HERNANDEZ: This is Arianna. CCTA – that is definitely the number one question that we get.

It is funded through ADA. We get funding through the number of students that attend. And we get full ADA funding for the academy. It is a flexible schedule, so that means we do get funding for the students coming in the morning and then for those that come in in the afternoon.

MS. CARRILLO: We also go local funding, Title I, SCE; and we also have grants that have been embedded within our campus to help us with that. We are a standalone campus; I think it's important that you know that.

MS. VAZQUEZ-HERNANDEZ: And it doesn't have the extracurriculars like the sports. I know that sports sometimes is a little bit more expensive at the regular campuses, but it is run the same way as a regular campus.

MS. WEETER: And just as a follow-up to that, someone asked if ADA funding is state money. And ADA stands for average daily attendance. So that is the amount of money that comes to the school per pupil count.

MS. CARRILLO: One of the questions is if we focus on anything besides college, anything else? Our goal is to get our kids college-connected, but that also getting them career-ready. So we do offer different types of certification programs through CCTA. Those are the two avenues that we try to gear our kids towards. But the main goal is to make sure that when they walk out, they walk out with a better future, whether it's by obtaining a certification, continuing with an associate's or bachelor's degree or being career-ready.

MS. WEETER: That's great. Would you like to talk a little bit more about how you engage the community in your efforts for outreach?

MS. VAZQUEZ-HERNANDEZ: Sure. We do have – at all of our campuses, especially our secondary campuses within our district, we have community liaisons. And these individuals are full-time employees at those campuses. And they are the attendance officers. They are the individuals that do make sure that all of our kids are in school, or if they're missing school they call or they visit – they make home visits.

So these individuals really are very important in this campaign because they for the most part already know the families; they already know the students. And so we do have the campaign in September, but their job never stops. They're part of the Countdown to Zero Initiative throughout the year. And it's not until September, right before deadline, when we try to get, of course, everybody enrolled. That is when we do approach other members of our community.

Because like you know, if you have somebody knocking on your door, calling you every single day, and you already know who they are, you're kind of going to ignore them or flag them because you already know their car, you know what they drive, and you're not going to open the door. And so by having other members of our community attend, it really, really has made an impact.

We call all over the city to let them know the dates. We have a volunteer form that we post everywhere on our website. We send it out; we let our local media know. We also send it out through our social media pages – anybody. It could be a business owner. Anybody can come in and volunteer with us. Sometimes it might be the former teacher, and we've had those where it was a student that was trying to run away; he knew we were there. But then he saw all these elementary teachers and he realized that, you know what, they care; they really care.

And we've had so many stories. One, for example, told the community liaison, look, I don't want to go back. I didn't make it the first time; what makes you think I'm going to make it the second time? And she's like, please, you can do it, of course. And he's like, look, if the superintendent comes, then I might think about it. So she got the superintendent to visit him, and he was of course in shock. And I have the picture. He was in shock and he was definitely – the superintendent told him, I care about you like I care about every single student that comes to our school. And he immediately enrolled that day and he graduated a semester after that.

So there are a lot of success stories. A lot of times they hear it all the time. They just hear it from the same people. And a lot of these kids don't have the support at home and they just maybe need to hear it from another person or somebody they look up to or somebody they once looked up to, like an elementary schoolteacher or the mayor or the chief of police or the Boys and Girls Club, or it may be a peer – to let them know, you know what, we care and we're here to support you.

MS. WEETER: So I think that ties nicely to another question we have about getting any school district administrator concerns around AYP and the accountability. And I think it speaks volumes when you say that the superintendent showed up at the student's door to say I care about you. So can you talk a little bit about the kind of buy-in that you've had from the school administration as well?

MS. CARRILLO: I think that within our community we do have the buy-in. It starts with our superintendent and his vision. And I think because of the success of the academy and the students that have gone through it and continued with postsecondary education – some of them have completed – it speaks volumes. It works.

We also have an open door policy. I mean, we have visits all the time, whether it's community members, other school districts, so they can come and see firsthand how students who were not productive at other times are now engaged in their learning and in control of what they're doing.

There was a question I wanted to address there. It's asking if the setting and climate of the academy is college or similar to a high school. I think the most important thing that we have in place there at CCTA is that it's a college culture and it begins on day one. And I think that embedding that mindset into students and making them recognize that you're no longer just in high school but you're in college, it changes the way they think, the way they behave and the way they work in the classroom.

So from the security guard to myself, the teachers, we make sure that we embed that within our students. Because even when the students come and register at our campus on day one, the first station they hit is that college station where we're already asking them to fill out their college application. We're already asking them what they want to do as a career. So really it starts on day one.

MS. VAZQUEZ-HERNANDEZ: And one thing I did want to add to that. We do provide transportation to and from the college. We do offer minimesters, and that's something we haven't talked about.

Through the partnership with South Texas College we offer these minimesters based on surveys that Ms. Carrillo gives to the students. And depending on what they want to study or what field they want to go into, those are the classes that they come up with for that mini-mester. And the students are bussed every day to and from the campus. So they are also at the college. They're already immersed in that culture and they're actually taking courses at the college while they're completing their high school requirement.

MS. WEETER: Great. We may have time for about one more question. So I think there are a couple questions that were both related to selecting students with only five or fewer students and data drove the decision to operate that way. And what do you do with the dropouts that exceed this five-credit threshold?

MS. CARRILLO: Well, first of all, the concept of our school is to service students who are older and closer to graduating. So basically our campus is like a senior-level campus, and that's the reasoning behind that. We wanted to make sure that our students experience quick success.

However, we do make exceptions. It's case-by-case. I do have some students that might be 17 years old. And if my campus is the best environment for them, then we're going to help them and we're going to make sure that we provide them the services that they need. So we do not reject students. I mean, we're there to work with anybody.

MS. VAZQUEZ-HERNANDEZ: And also just to add to that, we sometimes do have cases where they're even over 26 – the age where we do get the funding. But because we're here to really help our community prosper – Ms. Carrillo, she's really good at – she meets with these individuals. We've had 30-year-olds that literally needed a couple of credits or maybe one exit exam. She brings them in. We don't get funding for them, but we know that with our help they're going to be able to accomplish that goal and be successful.

MS. WEETER: OK. Thank you both. And I'm sorry; we don't have time to get to everybody's questions. But we do want to move forward so we can hear from Doris Terry Williams and learn about the building community will to support achievement for all youth. So thank you both.

MS. VAZQUEZ-HERNANDEZ: Thank you.

MS. CARRILLO: Thank you.

MR. KEATING: And if you're still typing into that chat, if you could just finish up real quick just so we can go back to the presentation. And keep in mind that we have logged everything and you'll be able to read what everyone else wrote at the end. And just a reminder that you can ask questions at any point in the main chat.

But we are going to go back there. So if you could just finish up – it looks like Phyllis (sp) is still typing. Phyllis, if you could just complete your thought there so we can go ahead and move there. All right.

MS. GROBE: Thank you, Brian. I think I have a little transition while we're moving from the chat to the slides. This is Terry Grobe again. And I wanted to thank Linda and Arianna. This work is so inspiring, and I love this story every time I hear it.

I was reflecting that when we opened the webinar and talked about the assets and challenges and talked about the technical working group and their first discussion of these assets and challenges, it really was the working group that said this issue of community will and leadership has everything to do with the success of dropout prevention and recovery efforts.

And so you can see that we've started with a success story and it builds on all the assets that we've mentioned and that you've added to in this webinar about the power of partnership, people being on the same page, if everybody's pulling together and knowing each other well, people wanting to help and do and pull together to solve a problem – it's all the best of the rural assets.

On the other hand, not every community is ready to do this work and ready immediately. And I know from growing up in a rural community that there were very set-in patterns in rural communities. Intergenerational poverty was something that was very apparent in my community, and there were very set-in ideas about who was going to succeed and who wasn't.

And if you grew up in certain families and you went to school where teachers had had your father – sometimes your grandfather – there wasn't a lot of room to move. People already had

you pegged as somebody who was going to succeed or not. And that can be very constraining. And in other communities, there are great racial and cultural tensions. In certain other communities there are migrations of new groups that were never living there before and they cause a lot of – this kind of activity causes a lot of tension between groups in the community and also can set up new ideas about who should succeed and who's expected to succeed and who doesn't.

So there can be great strains and stresses in rural communities. And in some communities there's really some pre-work that needs to happen in order to get ready and to build the kind of will that you need to move together as kind of one body and one collective to address this issue.

And so we were so fortunate to have Doris Terry Williams on our technical working group because she was able to share with us the work of the Rural School and Community Trust over the past years, working with a number of communities in North Carolina to help build their capacity in this area and to host a series of community conversations that helped people come together around the idea that all students should succeed and that the community should pull together to support the success of all their young people.

Doris has a practical process to share with us and some very, very helpful tools to present. And these kinds of conversations you might find very helpful for your community. So I want to turn it over to Doris, and I know that you will really enjoy the work that she's going to present to you today. Doris?

DORIS TERRY WILLIAMS: Thank you, Terry, and hello to everybody who's on the line. Thank you so much for joining us in this conversation today. It is something that's very close to my heart.

The Rural School and Community Trust – many of you on the call know us as an organization, but our primary goal is working in rural communities, including rural schools and communities together. And Terry has done really a great job, I think, in laying a transition to what I'm going to talk about today, the kind of work that Linda and Arianna have talked about. And the wonderful outcomes of their work in South Texas has to be applauded, and the leadership as well.

As Terry has said, in many of our communities, lots of times there's not that widespread public will that allows people to come together in those ways. And in some communities where there is will, there may not be an apparent – an entry point for people who are concerned about this kind of work.

So our aim as we approached the dialogue process that Terry mentioned was to help communities to mobilize themselves to reflect on what it is that they want for their children, what they want for their community, and to come up with very practical ways that they individually and collectively could make sure that that happened. And so we instituted a visioning process in northeastern North Carolina.

If you know, northeastern North Carolina is very rural. It's the historic Black Belt, tobacco-growing region of the state and historically persistently high-poverty area. We approached this

work with the notion that it should be asset-based work and not a deficit kind of model; that regardless of how strained resources are in any of our communities or what the statistics say about education levels and those kinds of things – that all of our communities have assets. They may be different from the assets that are in other places and even in other rural communities because rural is so tremendously diverse.

But the guiding question for – what would a community look like that ensures the success of all of its children? And we underscored the word “all” because we wanted to make sure that we were focusing not just on students that people expected to be successful, but every child in the community. What are the relationships that need to be in place for children to succeed and thrive? And what's the community's capacity to ensure the success of all of its children?

I want to share with you one of the counties, and the work in one of those four counties where we did this kind of work, starting in 2007 with funding from the Kellogg Foundation. Warren County, North Carolina has a wonderful history that grew out of its – actually early 1800s and before. But a wonderful education history; it was at one point a place where people sent their children from all over the state to study in private libraries, to shadow professionals, doctors and lawyers and those kinds of things. It was really this center of activity for the state but also for a large region of the country – the eastern part of the country – a very proud history.

The county now has about 28(00 ?) students, mostly African-American. The population of the country itself is mostly African-American. That again grows out of the days of slavery, when at one point slaves outnumbered free people about seven or eight to one. But the population is rapidly changing. Some years ago, when my family first moved to Warren County, it was about 75 percent African-American. It is now about 50 to 55 percent African-American, with a fairly substantial Native American population and Caucasian population and a growing number of new immigrants.

But somehow over the years, with economic declines and what sometimes I think of as intentional underdevelopment of the community, lots of things changed and the community went into decline. The economic base went into decline – education, people's interest in education. Some of that interest and connection between school and community was lost, largely through school desegregation and integration. It was a time when the schools were really the center of the community, both for the African-American community and the Caucasian community.

And African-American parents I think in particular came to trust schools were going to do the right thing for their kids and tended, once the schools were merged and desegregated, to back away from the schools being the kinds of centers of their activities that they had been before. And so community involvement in education has declined over the years there.

And so as we approached the issue of success for children in our communities and realized the kinds of challenges – the diversity, socioeconomic, racial and ethnic diversity within the community – we understood that in order to get people focused on success for children, that we had to be able to have the hard conversations that a lot of times we shied away from; and certainly the kinds of hard conversations that we don't bring to the floor across diverse groups.

And so this vision and process started with a lot of organizing within the community. Now, the Rural Trust is a national organization, so we understood that going into a community that we did not have the knowledge that we needed, the relationships at that time that we needed to really begin to galvanize community.

And so it was important for us to be able to identify people within the community and organizations within the community that had those kinds of relationships and credibility where they could reach deeply into the community and not just among the stakeholder groups that are always at the table; but to really shake out of the bushes, so to speak, those stakeholder groups that traditionally don't come to the table, and those how don't come to the table together. So we intentionally had a process in place that pulled diverse stakeholder groups together in the same place, in the same room.

And so the planning up front was very, very, very important. We developed discussion materials. We worked with local groups to build the kinds of relationships that we thought were important in order to facilitate this kind of conversation because it can. This conversation was around really difficult issues. We couldn't go straight to what are going to do or what we can do without really uncovering and being upfront with ourselves and having people be upfront with themselves and with their neighbors about where they were on this particular issue.

And so you can see on this slide those kinds of steps in organizing. And then we did what is actually a modification of everyday democracy study circle process, where we connected, first of all, with a community-based organization that had credibility and deep reach in the community who help identify to the recruitment around the study circle process. And so what happens is that we formed strict study groups or discussion groups of eight to 12 people each that meet for – in our model, we set four 2-hour meetings.

So one of the things about these discussions is that once they get started they take on a life of their own. And where we had a window of six months or so to do this discussion process – in many of the places the discussions for at least a couple of years, which is really an important point to make. But the idea, too, was then not just have people get together to talk but also to figure out what it was that they were going to do.

So there were key questions that were to guide the conversation. So we didn't want the conversations to become points where people were just blaming the schools for what was not happening. It wasn't about the schools. It was about the children and what we wanted for our children. And so we began by trying to level the grounds for everybody with the question of: How has our education affected our own lives?

And everybody could respond to that and everybody began to feel like they're on an equal playing field with everybody else. What do you want for young people? What's causing our children not to succeed? And looking at that, we looked at data not just from the school. We looked at juvenile justice data, health data; economic data. And we helped these everyday community people to understand how to read that data and how to put a face on that data.

Well, what came out of that process was a change of attitude across many, many diverse groups and sectors within the community, where individuals themselves actually gained new skills and confidence that they could in fact take action that would make a difference in the lives of children. We saw new relationships and new partnerships grow.

And at the end of that process – or at least our involvement in the process – an action plan that the community put together itself around the steps that they – again, individually and collectively, could take to help with the success of children. And there were roles for everybody – community members, business leaders, civic organizations and that kind of thing.

But I want to go back to the point of legitimizers and connecting with organizations that can reach deep into the community. Again, as I said, we have an asset-based approach to this. We connected in this community with the high school alumni organization, community development corporation, and the faith-based community. Our lead partner, though, was the high school alumni association because they had standing; they had credibility within the community and could legitimize what it is that we were trying to do.

And we were able to, with that organization, provide a hook for people to see what it was that was important to them and what would draw them into the process. And then ultimately we had a lot of people who said, well, I'm glad for the opportunity to have this conversation; I've been wanting to have this conversation. But we also have to move beyond the dialogue to action. Because people – in fact, many of them said, well, we've talked a lot but nothing has ever happened.

And so the last part of the dialogue process is the community visioning forum, where we brought all of the dialogue groups together. You have multiple groups going on at the same time, and then they all come together in a big community forum. One of the resources that you have here on the site is a document that came out of that process in Warren County. It's called "From Talk to Action." And you will see in the document the steps that individuals set and organizations set that they would be able to do that.

Some specific examples around that. The alumni association, one of the churches, and the community development organizations decided that they were going to do a communitywide extended learning program because of the data that they saw. It said that students lose the most over – particularly low-performing and underprivileged children – academically lose the most during out-of-school time. And so they reasoned that they would do – they would blanket their community with high-quality extended learning opportunities.

And so they have afterschool programs; they have summer programs, Saturday academies. And these things are affiliated with the schools but they are community-based initiatives. One of the things that this process helped people to understand is that schools can't do everything. The community has to step up and has to have some responsibility and some accountability for the success of their own children. And so out of that process – and again, those community-based programs are still going. They have applied for grants and received grants from outside. They've mobilized their own community resources and channeled their own resources towards this effort, Success for Children.

And I'm going to stop there and turn it back over for any questions or comments that people might have.

MS. WEETER: Great. Well, thank you so much, Doris. That was very wonderful to hear. We are going to now open it up to questions from the audience. And again, if you want to type those questions into the chat feature, we can try to get to as many of those questions as possible, particularly related to what resonates from this conversation with the experiences that you've had working in rural districts or communities. And if you've seen any examples of this kind of community building work taking place in your community, feel free to put those in the chat, too.

But we can go ahead and ask some questions to Doris.

MR. KEATING: And just a reminder that we have made the resources available – I saw a question about that right before we switched over. When we go back to the presentation slides, you'll be able to download those resources and they'll be available at the end as well. And we are saving all of these comments that are coming in throughout the webinar in these open chats. We're going to making that available at the end as well. So just keep that in mind. Stick with us until the end. You'll be able to give us some feedback about the webinar, and then go ahead and download these slides – I mean, download the slides and any feedback as well.

MS. WEETER: Thanks, Brian.

So the first question that I see coming in is related to the specific kinds of issues that community members were able to tackle. Can you talk a little bit more about that, Doris?

MS. WILLIAMS: Yeah. There were multiple issues because, again, the issue of child success was just so huge.

One of the things, for example, that we're seeing in our rural communities, same kinds of issues and challenges around children that we have seen a lot in urban communities but have not experienced and don't have the resources many times to deal with in rural communities. And so the issues around what kinds of support really need to be in place and what kinds of responses need to be in place were part of the conversations and the things that people were able to address.

One of the big things had to do with opportunities, again, outside of school. And students – although it's a rural community and a fairly small rural community, not feeling connected to caring adults and to their own heritage. And so one of the things that came out of that was actually a workgroup that called themselves "the connectiveness group" or something to that effect. And so we had a local artist and photographer to come up and do – used the cameras, photography to get kids connected to older adults. There was another oral history project that was also connected to the photography project. And then again, it was all about connecting kids back to their own heritage.

Another issue had to do with community apathy. And so there was a workgroup that decided that they were going to attack the issue of apathy. They contacted – and there are like 200

churches in Warren County in a 400-square mile area. But they contacted many of the churches to get them to begin to send individuals to county commissioner meetings, to school board meetings, and to those kinds of things, to come back and report to parishioners what was going on so that there was an awareness of that. Many of those churches are still doing that, where people are actually becoming much more engaged.

The other thing was around human capital, to get the work done. And so what the process did was unearth a lot of volunteers. We have a very large retirement community growing in Warren County around Lake Aston and Carr Lake. And these are people who in their professional lives may have vacationed in the area because of the wonderful resources that we have here but were unable to find an entry point into working with kids and with schools but who found a way to do that through this process. So those were some of the kinds of issues that people dealt with and were able to tackle here.

The other thing was just connecting school and community. That was the huge issue. The schools were on a track where they really did want to do well and they wanted to do the right things by kids. But again, many of our teachers – because again, it's a rural place and we struggle a lot of the amenities that young people, particularly new teachers, are looking for. When they come to a place, we don't have those. So many of our teachers live outside of the district. And so connecting the school and community in that way.

One of the things that grew out of that is we have a group in the county called the Heritage Quilters. And this quilting group took on the task of orienting new teachers to the community. And so each year now – I think they've done this for at least three years – they have done a community tour all day long, where they put new teachers on the bus and they just take them to the county. They introduce them to key people, to key sites, historic sites and that kind of thing.

And then they meet with them a couple of times during the academic year. So the whole issue of teacher recruitment and retention was also one that this group took on out of this process.

MS. WEETER: OK. We have a lot of really great questions and unfortunately we're not going to be able to get to all of them. But can you talk quickly about how formal the organization was of the community groups in reference to them being able to obtain grants? Was anyone among them sort of incorporated as a 501(c)(3) or did you perhaps use an intermediary to pursue any external funding to support your initiative?

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, we've had grants from a couple of sources. One, the Rural Trust served as the fiscal agent. We actually applied for and got the grants. It's sort of a pass-through to the organization. They also got a state dropout prevention grant, and on that one the community development corporation was the fiscal agent and the lead applicant for that one.

The wonderful thing about partnering in this kind of way and building these kinds of collaborations is there are grants; there are places that faith-based groups can go to get funding. There are other places that community development corporations can go. And there are places that an intermediary like the Rural Trust can go. And so having that kind of collaboration among

groups – some that do have 501(c)(3)'s and some that don't – certainly increases your opportunities for funding.

MS. WEETER: OK. Thanks. And I see several questions here that I think would also be – some of the questions might have answers in the two resources that we recommend, so I'm going to defer to some other questions, given the time that we have.

So one issue that I know is not uncommon that Tina (sp) highlights is she's in a small community with very limited resources and only a few businesses in town. They've had some natural disasters recently. What would your thoughts be on how to involve the community within the school culture without having to ask for money or expecting individuals to take off of work, given their current context and what you've seen? How does that relate?

MS. WILLIAMS: Well, I think in many of our communities, even though we've not had the natural disasters and those kinds of things – Warren County is historically a very, very poor county, and so there's a perception that there aren't resources within the county.

But one of the things that we felt is that most of the communities – and this is not just from working in Warren County, but across the country in rural places – have human resources and people who want to do things and they don't have a way to do them. Extended learning, afterschool, mentoring, those kinds of things – some of those things don't cost a lot of money. It's about galvanizing the resources that you do have, the assets that you do have, and targeting those resources to the issue that you want.

Another thing I want to mention is community foundations. There are some that are probably, you know, countywide or citywide. But there are also regional community foundations and school foundations – many times who are looking for ways to have a greater impact in the places that they serve. And so I would strongly encourage people to research, connect with the community foundations. We have a wonderful model of community foundation support in the Ozarks in Missouri; a regional piece where lots and lots of resources have been targeted towards issues around education and success of children.

MS. WEETER: Great. Thank you, Doris.

And I think we are unfortunately out of time for more questions. So at this time I'm going to turn it back over to Terry, who's going to talk some about creating systems to support this important work.

MS. GROBE: Thank you, Christina. And I do want to direct people to the resources that you can download after the webinar if you'd like. In particular, I think that the facilitator guide and the report on the Warren County work that Doris has offered participants will answer a lot of the questions that I saw on the screen and provide some particularly practical advice for how to do and adapt this kind of work in your home communities.

So thank you, Doris. I found your presentation – both presentations today – very, very inspiring and I trust that the audience did, too. And I'm hoping that the presentations gave everybody a

little bit of time and space to consider to what extent, as you do this work, the community has your back.

So do you have a fully-engaged community? Do you have a community where everybody recognizes that this is an issue and there is considerable will to do something about it? So you could think about how to mobilize all that will to actually do even more than you're doing now. Or do you have a community that's fairly divided and you might want to start to do some of the work that Doris is talking about so that you build more collective will to address this dropout issue? And when you get more will then you're able, I think, to move beyond what can be very strong activities but they can be a little marginal, to building systems that really begin to give you an impact on your dropout rate where you live.

And the setting up of the systems that drive dropout prevention, intervention and recovery often start with the development of what is known now as early warning systems, where students get identified early who are struggling in school or falling off track; sometimes starts in sixth grade, sometimes in seventh, sometimes ninth; and then a partnered approach to providing a system of tiered support for students depending on how seriously they're struggling with school or outside issues.

And then new or strengthened programming to address the needs of young people who are off-track for graduation who are not in fact on a trajectory to graduate with their age mates; or young people who've dropped out before they finished a credential. All of those young people are likely to need a different program option if they're going to successfully re-engage with their education, finish high school and be able to take their next steps, as what's described in the CCTA that you heard about today.

And so in order to delve more deeply into how you set up these systems, we are going to make that systemic work the focus of our next webinars. Webinar two, which we're going to offer in the fall, will present information on setting up early warning systems with special considerations for rural areas. And we're also going to present some rural practices that have proved particularly successful in helping young people succeed in school.

We're going to be joined by Robert Belfanz from the Everyone Graduates Center, and we will be focusing on some very practical strategies that you should be able to implement in your communities, should you find that those would be helpful for your students.

And then webinar three, which we'll offer in the winter of 2013, will focus on recovery programs that have been successful in rural areas.

So we hope you'll sign up for these sessions, too, and also encourage local staff with interest or experience in this work to join us.

So thank you very much, everyone. We so appreciated having you on the webinar and we so appreciated your interactivity despite the large numbers that have joined us for this webinar. I'm going to turn the program over to my colleague, Christina Weeter, from the Department of Education, to close our session today.

MS. WEETER: Thank you, Terry.

I do want to thank each and every one of you for your participation in the webinar today, and a special thanks to all of our presenters.

Just note that the webinar meeting space will remain open for about 30 minutes, if you want to download the resources that you can find in the upper-left corner of the webinar platform. Participants will also receive an email notifying them when the recording of this webinar has been posted on the website. And that will include all of the audio. There will be a written transcript as well. So we encourage you to share this with any colleagues that weren't able to join us today.

Information about the next webinar – the next two webinars, actually – will also be posted at the web address once we've fleshed out those details. And you will also receive a save-the-date type of email once we have those specific dates and agendas confirmed.

Finally, our contact information is here. If you would like to be in touch to follow up with either Terry or me, we encourage you to continue sharing your stories with us. And we thank you again for your participation. We look forward to having you join us again later this year.

MR. KEATING: All right. Great. And stay with us, everybody, because we're actually going to, as we mentioned, transition now to a feedback session where you can continue to submit ideas, actually download all the comments that have come in through those open chats throughout the webinar today. As you can see, the contact information is there on your screen. You can actually download that from the slides directly, and that way you can access all of that.

We just went ahead and switched over to an open format here where you can rate the webinar, give us feedback and also, as we said, ask us any questions or give us any final thoughts or reaction.

Just a note that we have actually went ahead and created that resource document. That's in the chat file share window to the left-hand side of your screen. And it is called "comments and feedback," with today's date. It's at the bottom of that file share window. I will also upload that to the window to the right if you'd like to download all the other files except for that one that we just created today. It's zipped into one single file that you can also download from that file share window to the right.

And again, depending on if you thought the webinar was excellent, fair or poor, please feel free to give us some feedback in that chat there, right below that poll there. And also on the right-hand side, if you have any final thoughts or reactions in addition to what we talked about on the webinar, you can go ahead and type that into the chat on the right. And again, there's the file share windows that I already mentioned.

So we're going to go ahead and leave it there. Like we said, we're going to go ahead and complete the audio portion of the webinar today. But we will leave this webinar room open for

at least 30 minutes to give you a chance to download those files if you'd like, if you haven't already had the chance to do so, and also to give us any feedback that you've got – thoughts or last reactions, stuff like that.

So again, we'll go ahead and complete the formal part of the webinar. But again, thanks everybody for participating today and we look forward to seeing you on the other webinars later on.

Thanks so much, everybody. Have a great day.

(END)