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Chairs Summit
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Breakout IID– New Ideas for Rural Education

Rep. John Patterson (OH), retired teacher, moderated the panel, and welcomed the attendees. He began by introducing the two speakers – Shonda Atwater from Metropolitan Community College, with expertise in public advocacy and strategic business expansion. Also presenting will be Dr. Allen Pratt, Director of National Rural Education Association.

Jobs of Skilled Trades

Shonda Atwater led off the discussion. She mentioned the careers the Metropolitan Community College of Kansas City teaches – welding, tool and dye, maintenance mechanics. They're giving people a pathway to the middle class. The apprenticeship model is a golden ticket. It's a three-legged stool.

On one leg, you've got the business side of things. On the other leg, you're giving that person a college education, allowing them to come out of college with a debt-free certificate, debt-free associates degree, or just debt-free college credits. On the other leg, that person is also getting a paycheck to work or to attend school.

Businesses were calling the college to request particular skill sets from their students. However 90-95% of the students are hired before they're finished with college. Many times their employers are paying them to go to school, or they are hired before completion by desperate employers. In Kansas City, there are great opportunities in manufacturing, but there are colliding pressures. Low unemployment rates mean that there is a big difference between being employed and being fully employed at a highly skilled job that is transferable. At the same time, manufacturing is going up, so if they don't skill up their current employees, they are going to end up hurting themselves.

There is a big push in working with K-12, and getting students excited about going into these 'Gold Collar' high tech jobs. It has been a hard sell. In many people's minds, manufacturing is a dying field. However, manufacturing has changed over the years, and it is an attractive field to enter. They have developed a partnership with employers and the college working with the Department of Labor. The program is designed to make what the student is learning on the job equate to classroom work that they would be taking on campus. The college designs this curriculum with the business, hand in hand, to make sure that they are getting the outcomes they are looking for.

Growth of the Program

They have received grants from the Department of Labor. The demand grew rapidly. The model itself can be replicated in rural areas in a very easy manner. There are creative ways to make the program work outside the metropolitan area. She began going after the unskilled incumbent workers currently at businesses now. The employers at first balked at sending their current employees to the program, because they are hungry for new employees. She reminded them that they needed to invest in their current employees and progressing them in the business, versus what happens if you keep them on and they don't progress. It would be a real opportunity loss.

They are now starting to expand into matching businesses with graduating and recently graduated students. They are working with the Mayor's Office to create speed interviews. They also work with

the Unemployment Agencies in the area to help identify talent that can be matched with businesses. And from there start to look at how to best serve the veteran community as well.

THE EDUCATION PRECURSOR

Dr. Pratt noted that NREA (National Rural Education) was founded in 1907 as part of the Department of Rural Education and NEA. In the mid-'70s, NEA went to a different model without focusing on rural and NREA broke away, founding their own association. They were on four college campuses.

Dr. Pratt works on the legislative and the 'normal' side. They are fighting for several causes. One is broadband and connectivity.

Broadband

E-Rate, Homework Gap – these are big issues for rural schools and communities. They work closely with the Dept. of Education in D.C. They ask what his opinion is of school choice or charter schools in rural areas. He answers by asking if they have been to Gold Creek, Montana. There is a one-room schoolhouse with 8 students. K-8 and one teacher. If you talk about school choice, their school choice is an hour and forty-five minutes away.

They ask about broadband and suggest connectivity. He answers that is not always an option either. If you fix this issue, we can then talk about school choice and other issues. But they need to be connected first.

Title 2 Funding

These funds are used to prep teachers either by colleges and universities or LEAs. If that money goes away, the rural schools are going to hurt for teacher prep and teacher retention.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Teaching in rural areas is a major issue in all 50 states. One idea is that communities and schools can provide some sort of housing to attract the teachers. At a recent conference, a panel was asked why they left their communities. The answers were often about money, but no opportunity to come back to was also a frequent answer. He doesn't believe there will be a situation where teachers will stay in the field for thirty years anymore. It's going to be a 5-6 year window for teachers, 10-15 maximum. That's how the Millennial generation is going to work. Education Prep has to keep this in mind. They have to make it a quick certification process to get teachers in the rural areas, and they need to do a better job in the rural communities to sell teaching as a great career.

Connect Americans Now

This is a coalition formed that tried to open up broadband space and TV light spaces so that local rural communities and schools can have better access to broadband quality, along with wireless networks. It's exciting to see people who have a rural mindset and have been involved in rural education.

QUESTIONS

Ms. Atwater was asked if they have a dual credit program with high schools. She said they indeed have dual credit, and they are doing just about everything at the current time. The apprenticeship

programs are regionally based with a flat fee tuition. These apprenticeships will eventually be offering dual credit with high schools and colleges. The first step in bringing apprenticeships to high schoolers will be a Match Day.

Should students be identified earlier in their school life whether they will be going to college or take up apprenticeships was discussed. ESSA plans in most states have career readiness goals in them. More pressure should be placed on counselors, who tend to push their students into college whether or not they are suited. There is a movement to send teachers and counselors out to businesses for internships to learn what the potential career paths are.

Incentivizing teachers to go to rural districts was discussed. Colorado is doing some good things with that. They have rural education outreach part of their Department of Education. And the University of Northern Colorado had a \$2 million grant from DOE to start the process, and focused on teacher pipeline, teacher retention. If college prep programs for teachers do not change, rural education is going to be out of business. Teachers are not connected with their communities enough. Most states have increased their GPA requirements for teacher candidates, and they have gone to new testing standards for residency models, etc. But it will decrease the numbers of teacher.

Texas Tech has a program called 'Teach Texas'. If you have an Associate's degree, you can become a licensed teacher within a year. They work with the local rural communities and their education programs. We need to think outside of the box. The State Departments of Education have to be flexible enough to allow rural districts to be different and connect with universities.

The land grant universities were founded to support the rural communities. They should be held accountable.

Rural Jobs Coalition shows that the entrepreneurial spirit in rural communities is alive and well. The bump good ideas run into is the need for help, so entrepreneurialism isn't getting much traction. There needs to be a way to add language to the jobs bills to come back to the apprenticeship engagement. Consistency in the laws regarding apprenticeships and rural education is necessary. Missouri has a federally-run apprenticeship program. Kansas is a state run apprenticeship state. Adding in connectivity with businesses and community colleges who supply the courses and training is a good start.

The adaptable model can be found among the handout documents at the end of this transcript. Appendix A from the Department of Labor outlines what the wage schedules are, what the on the job training schedule is, and then it outlines the classroom work that is developed with that. This model can be adjusted to be more specific to each business. Schedules can be adjusted as well.

The link between the opioid crisis and the lack of career opportunities. The apprenticeship model has shown that underserved populations excel well when they can partner with someone, have a mentor, have somebody guide them in a specific direction. Having a sense of pride in what you do is necessary to a feeling of self-worth.

There is a different perception of relationships between rural areas where everybody knows everybody. There is a safety net there, and young kids try to go to the city to lose so they can become anonymous. Some flourish in this new environment. But we need to understand that the relationships left in rural areas are even more critically important.

The potential for virtual classrooms looks promising, but it requires high speed broadband. With virtual classrooms, you can bring in the best teachers in the country to teach them. Utah is doing work on this as well. Blending learning and online learning models are very important.