

NREA Executive Committee 2023-2024

President: David Ardrey – Chair



Mr. David M. Ardrey is now in his 10th year as the Executive Director of the Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools (AIRSS). Before joining AIRSS he served as the Director of School Partnerships and Outreach at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, he was a founding member and first Chairman of the Rural Schools Collaborative, and he has committed the last 10 years serving NREA on its executive committee, the Foundation (NREAF) and its policy Coalition (NREAC).

President-Elect: Dr. Melissa Sadorf



An educator at all levels for almost three decades, Dr. Sadorf brings considerable expertise in leadership and teacher preparation, policy development and advocacy, and education in rural settings. No matter the age of the student, she works to engage and motivate learners with rigorous and relevant content built on a foundation of relationships in the classroom. Her commitment to giving back to the teaching profession has opened opportunities to mentor educators in both rural and urban settings, ensuring they gain the skills and background knowledge to hone their leadership. She serves as Adjunct Faculty for Northern Arizona University and Central Arizona College in a variety of courses concentrated on teacher preparation and educational leadership. She also serves as the Executive Director of the Arizona Affiliate of ASCD. In the past decade, Dr. Sadorf has focused on advocating for rural education and rural leaders. In that venue, she is involved with local, state, and regional organizations to help raise awareness on the unique challenges that rural educators face. She hosts a podcast that explores rural issues and holds monthly superintendent virtual round tables to ensure rural voices are being heard.

Pres-Designate: Dr. Devon Brenner



Dr. Devon Brenner, director of the SSRC and professor of teacher education in the College of Education. Brenner's research focuses on rural teacher recruitment and retention and rural education policy. Brenner is PI on the NSF-funded collaborative research grant Teacher Preparation for Rural Teacher Persistence and Retention (TPR)², a collaboration with 14 rural serving institutions across the US, and recently co-authored the rural teacher education textbook, *Teaching in Rural Places: Thriving in Classrooms, Schools and Communities*. Brenner coordinates the Mississippi Education Policy Fellowship Program, a state chapter of a national program that trains education leaders to engage in education policy and advocacy and co-edits *The Rural Educator*, journal of the National Rural Education Association.

Past-Pres.: Allison Nys



Allison Nys grew up in Montana and has spent her entire educational career in Montana. Allison taught for 16 years in a rural school (average 60 students K-6) which happened to be the same rural school she attended as a child. She has another 11 years in administration as a principal and curriculum director. She holds degrees in Art (K-12 teaching), K-8 Teaching and Educational Leadership along with a Superintendent Licensure.

Allison is heavily involved with rural education and has been an active member of the National Rural Education Association since 2006, after winning the Montana Rural Teacher of the year award. She has sat on the Executive Board since 2010 and was the President of the association twice (2016 & 2022).

Ed Service Agency: Scott Turney



In 1974 Scott graduated from Indiana State University and began teaching immediately. That first teaching job started a 45-year career in education. For his first years he taught in rural Indiana schools, including a three-room school. In most cases he not only was the teacher but the administrator as well. At the time he was awarded the principal job at Eastern Greene Elementary School in Bloomfield, Indiana, he was the youngest administrator in the state. He moved into some “larger” rural schools where we continued his career as an administrator eventually taking the leap into being a Superintendent of New Harmony School District. In time, Scott moved into other educational jobs. He became the Executive Director of the Southern Indiana Educational Center in Jasper, Indiana where he finally officially retired on December 31, 2019.

Over Scott’s career he was awarded Indiana Principal’s Leadership Academy “Leader of Instructors” and “Peer Facilitator” awards as well as earning Administrative Study Council “Negotiator Emeritus” award.

In 1996, Scott attended his first National Rural Education Association conference in San Antonio. Since, he has only missed one! It didn’t take him long to get deeply rooted into our association serving on our Executive Board in multiple positions as well as our President in 2016. He also spent numerous years on our Foundation Board serving in multiple positions as well as the President of the board. Scott has given NREA 23 years of his educational experience, friendship, and dedication.

School Board Rep.: Jerry White



BS in Accounting/Education-University of Maine-Machias-1967
MEd-School Administration University of Maine-Orono—1980
CAS-Superintendency-University of Maine-Orono-1983

Taught Business Education 1967-69, 73-80, Van Buren Jr-Sr High School
Assistant Principal at Van Buren Jr-Sr High School-1980-83. US Air Force-Russian
Linguist/Translator-1969-73. Superintendent of Schools, various school districts-1983-2013. Mid

Coast School of Technology School Board-2014-present. Northeast & The Islands Regional Educational Lab Governing Board-2014-present. National Rural Education Association Executive Board-2017-present. Inducted into the NREA Hall of Fame-2022. Maine's Superintendent of the Year-1989. Maine Small Schools Coalition-NREA Legislative Representative-2005-present. AASA/Apple Computer President's Technology Award-2003

State Affiliate Rep.: Dr. Chris Lagoni



Christopher Lagoni began his career as a middle school teacher in Indiana and is currently the State Director for Indiana Small and Rural Schools. He loves helping people understand the geographical, population density, and staffing differences that occur in rural areas and believes the best way to end generational poverty, protect democracy, and advocate for equal opportunity is through a rigorous education.

School Admin: Dr. Bill Chapman



Dr. Bill Chapman was named the superintendent for the Palacios Independent School District in Palacios, TX in August 2020. Prior to Palacios, he spent eight years as superintendent in Jarrell, TX and also served as a school administrator in Coldspring, Willis, and Huntsville. Before he became a school administrator, he was a teacher and coach in both Huntsville and Corpus Christi, TX.

Rural Educator Rep: Dr. Jason Bell



Jason Bell has twenty-one years' experience as a public educator in a rural school system and has served as an English teacher, assistant principal, principal, and currently serves as the secondary supervisor for Polk County Schools in Tennessee. He completed his educational doctorate in 2013 and has undergraduate and graduate degrees in English and Administration, respectively. He has also previously served as the President of the National Rural Education Association while currently serving as the Executive Director of the Tennessee Rural Education Association and board member on the National Rural Education Association.

State Department of Education Rep: Dr. Alissa Sasser



Dr. Alissa Sasser is the Partnerships Specialist for the Office of Rural Education and Innovation. She is originally from rural upstate New York and moved to Mt. Vernon, Ga in 1996 to pursue her bachelor's degree in Middle Grades Education from Brewton-Parker College. In 2018, Dr. Sasser obtained her Doctoral degree from Georgia Southern University. During her 23-year tenure in public education, she has served students in rural districts throughout southeast Georgia as a teacher, cheerleading coach, as well as a school and district administrator.

At-Large: Heather Zellers



Heather Zellers is the Director of Information and Advocacy for the Rural Schools Association of New York (RSA). Prior to accepting this position, she served on the RSA Board of Directors for five years, and is currently in her 11th year as a board member with the Seneca Falls Central School District's Board of Education.

With more than a decade of experience in education and student advocacy, she has received multiple accolades in recognition of her continued efforts, including the NYSBBA Champion for Change Award and the Anne Z. Paulin Award for Outstanding Leadership on the Behalf of Rural Schools.

In 2019, Heather was elected to the NREA Executive Committee, and also serves as the President of the NREA Foundation and the Chair of the National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium.

Higher-Ed: Dr. Darius Means



Hailing from South Carolina, Darris Means is an associate professor and Dean's Faculty Scholar in Equity, Justice, and Rural Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In his rural education research, he often collaborates *with* rural high school and undergraduate students to examine and address inequities in postsecondary education access and success for rural students. Darris has been actively engaged with the National Rural Education Association, serving as a member of the NREA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Team from 2019-2022 and serving on the editorial board for *The Rural Educator* since 2019. During his tenure as a member of NREA, he developed a partnership between NREA's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Team and the American Education Research Association's Rural Education Special Interest Group to co-host a webinar series in spring 2022 on equity, diversity, and inclusion in rural education. If elected to the Executive Committee, Darris hopes to expand opportunities for rural education researchers, K-12 leaders, higher education, and policymakers to learn from each other and build upon the assets in rural communities to address pressing challenges and opportunities in rural education.