

ACRES



AMERICAN COUNCIL ON RURAL SPECIAL EDUCATION

Welcome to ACRES' 46th Annual National Conference

***Working 9 to Thrive:
An Oasis for Rural Special Educators***



Renaissance Palm Springs

888 Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, California, USA

Thursday, March 26 - Friday, March 27

Conference Program Chair

Christine Powell, Ph.D., Radford University

Conference Headquarters, West Virginia University

Kim Floyd, Headquarters Co-Coordinator

Alex Hollo, Headquarters Co-Coordinator

Thank you for joining us at the Annual National Conference of the **American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES)**. Did you know ACRES holds the only national conference devoted to rural special education issues? Our goal is to gather and share the most current knowledge, research, and practices in rural special education for in-service and pre-service educators, administrators, related service providers, parents, and policymakers. We hope your conference experience is enjoyable and productive.

Special thanks to all the individuals who participated in the proposal review process

2026 ACRES Schedule At-a-Glance

Time	Session type	Events	Location
WEDNESDAY, March 25, 2026			
1:00 – 5:30 pm		Conference Check-In & Registration	Registration
1:00 pm – 5:30 pm		Silent Auction- <i>Drop off your items!</i>	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
6:00 pm	Board	Board of Directors Meeting (Closed)	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
THURSDAY, March 26, 2026			
6:45 am - 5:00 pm		Conference Check-In & Registration	Registration
6:45 am - 5:00 pm		Silent Auction	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
6:45 am - 7:40 am		Buffet Breakfast	
7:40 am - 7:50 am		Welcome and Ringing of the Cowbell	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
8:00 am – 8:50 am	Breakout 1		
9:00 am - 9:50 am	Breakout 2	Roundtables 1	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
10:00 am - 10:50 am	Breakout 3	Roundtables 2	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
11:00 am - 11:50 am	Breakout 4		
12:00 pm – 1:25 pm		Lunch & Keynote Address	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
1:30 pm - 2:20 pm	Breakout 5		
2:30 pm - 3:20 pm	Breakout 6	Roundtables 3	
3:30 pm - 4:20 pm	Breakout 7	Roundtables 4	
4:30 pm – 4:45 pm	General	Town Hall Meeting	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
4:45 pm – 6:00 pm	Social	Welcome Reception	Date Restaurant patio
Friday, March 27, 2026			
7:00 am - 5:00 pm		Conference Check-In & Registration	
7:00 am – 4:30 pm		Silent Auction	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
7:00 am - 8:00 am		Breakfast	
8:00 am – 8:50 am	Breakout 8		
9:00 am - 9:50 am	Breakout 9	Roundtables 5	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
10:00 am - 10:50 am	Breakout 10	Roundtables 6	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
11:00 am - 11:50 am	Breakout 11		
12:00 pm – 1:25 pm		Awards and Recognition Lunch	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
1:30 pm - 2:20 pm	Breakout 12		
2:30 pm - 3:20 pm	Breakout 13		
3:30 pm – 5:00 pm	Posters	Posters & Afternoon Social	Catalina-Madera Ballroom
5:00-5:30 pm		Closing Board Meeting (Open to all attendees)	Catalina-Madera Ballroom

Make sure to visit the exhibitors' tables!



2026 ACRES Conference Program

WEDNESDAY, March 25, 2026

Conference Check-In & Silent Auction Drop Off

1:00 pm - 5:00

Check out the Silent Auction for interesting finds from all over the country! Bid on your favorites and have fun trying to out-bid others. All proceeds support the ACRES Teacher Scholarship Award.

THURSDAY, March 26, 2026

6:45 am - 5:00 pm	Conference Check-In, registration, Silent Auction drop off	Registration &
6:45 am - 7:40 am	Buffet Breakfast	Ballroom

Conference Opening and Welcome

Todd Sundeen, Board President

7:40 am - 7:50 am, Ballroom

Enjoy your breakfast and get ready for the opening session at 8:00.
After a short welcome, Dr. Sundeen will formally kick off the conference by ringing the traditional cowbell!

Breakout 1: Thursday, 8:00 am – 8:50 am

Chino A	<i>Angela Norris, University of Northern Colorado</i> Building Pathways: Supporting Paraprofessionals Becoming Special Education Teachers in Rural Schools This session shares findings from interviews with paraprofessionals in a rural Colorado district–university partnership pursuing special education licensure. Participants reported barriers, including financial strain and scheduling issues, as well as supports such as mentoring and cohort models. Results inform para-to-teacher pathways and guide future rural research in Georgia and beyond.
Chino B	<i>Dr. Michele DeBerry, University of Oklahoma; Dr. Amber Davis, University of Oklahoma</i> From Therapy Room to Rural Classroom: Inclusive Supports That Help Students with Autism Thrive Learn practical, evidence-based strategies to help rural therapists embed communication, sensory, motor, and social supports into everyday classroom routines. Discover simple tools, collaborative approaches, and portable interventions that strengthen inclusion and help students with autism thrive across rural school settings.
Pueblo A	<i>Zoe Dean, University of Florida</i> Helping Rural Educators Thrive: Evaluating Literacy IEP Goal Quality This study analyzes de-identified IEPs from one rural district to evaluate literacy goal quality and alignment using a hybrid rubric combining SMART criteria with literacy indicators. Findings reveal patterns in specificity and measurability, informing pre-service and in-service training to improve evidence-based goal writing in rural settings.
Pueblo B	<i>Kim Muschaweck, Georgia College & State University; Stephen Wills, Georgia College & State University</i> The Critical Role of Field-Based Placements in Rural Schools Developing a vision of the rewards and benefits of working in rural schools can begin for preservice teachers in their freshman year of college through purposeful field-based placements. Participants will learn how to develop field-based partnerships in rural schools that address the critical issue of building capacity in rural communities while increasing teacher recruitment and retention.
	1 Supervision CEU
Andreas	<i>MaryAnn Demchak, University of Nevada, Reno; Chevonne Sutter, University of Nevada, Reno</i> Remote Preparation of BCBA Trainees to Work in School-based Special Education Settings This session will focus on remote preparation of Board-Certified Behavior Analyst trainees to work in public, school-based, special education settings, rather than clinical settings. Remote strategies that can be embedded in coursework to effectively prepare BCBA for schools will be highlighted. Addressing the importance of working collaboratively with school staff will be emphasized.

Breakout 2: Thursday, 9:00 am - 9:50 am

Chino A	<p><i>Cathy Johnan, SUNY at New Paltz</i> From Home to School and Back: Engaging Preschool Students and Their Families in Rural Settings For children diagnosed with autism, anxiety, difficulty in communicating, OCD and/or multiple disabilities, it is often more difficult to engage a child in play. We will not only share the importance of play for all children, but also, ways to start, encourage and enhance play for those children who may have limited or no skills in this imperative area of development.</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Christopher T. Closson, Empire State University</i> The Hierarchy for an Inclusive Mindset A recent research study has identified a developmental pathway that supports educators in cultivating a more inclusive mindset, culminating in the creation of the Hierarchy for an Inclusive Mindset. This theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of personal growth and self-reflection in aligning an educator's perspective with the diverse needs of learners.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Arnold Nyarambi, East Tennessee State University</i> Substance Abuse, Behavior and Mental Health Crisis in K-12 Schools in Rural Appalachia This session is to provide knowledge and skills to in-service and pre-service educators on how to address substance abuse, behavior and mental health crises in rural Appalachia. The presenter will present data on the prevalence of substance abuse, behavior and mental health challenges. The presenter will then open discussion to the participants on strategies to address these issues.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Rhonda Kerr, Lincoln Memorial University</i> Preparing Future Teachers to Support Students with Mental Health Issues The purpose of this session is to equip those who teach in education preparation programs to prepare future educators to support students with mental health issues in the classroom. Session attendees will learn strategies from current research and best practices in order to prepare future educators to support students with mental health challenges in the classroom.</p>
Santa Rosa	<p style="text-align: center;">Double session: Two talks on a related topic</p> <p>1. <i>Andrea Smith, University of North Florida</i> MTSS in Teacher Preparation: A Scoping Literature Review The presenter will share her scoping literature review focused on instruction and application opportunities regarding Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) for academics in teacher preparation. The session will explore themes relevant to rural education threaded through the literature and suggestions for implementation.</p> <p>2. <i>Jared Stewart-Ginsburg, North Carolina State University</i> Can MTSS help teachers work 9-to-Thrive? Implementing a system to support teacher well-being Do preparation programs enact a Wait to Fail model for preparing Special Education teachers? In this presentation, we will share how we reimagined a college-wide MTSS to support teacher candidates' well-being and correct the "Wait to Fail" model of teacher preparation.</p>
Ballroom	<p style="text-align: center;">Roundtables session 1: Attendees change tables every 20 minutes</p> <p>1. <i>Dan Boudah, East Carolina University</i> Building School Readiness and Community Resilience Post-COVID Pandemic Resilience is a desired outcome of school readiness and a protective factor against adversity, strengthened through supportive relationships, consistent expectations, and social emotional skill-building. School leadership cultivated Community Learning Exchanges to create shared understandings of school readiness and create pathways to strengthen students and community.</p> <p>2. <i>Melissa Casses, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown; Adam Bilinsky, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown</i> Understanding post-covid pre-service educator needs in rural context This session will present an exploratory mixed-method study that examines the biopsychosocial and academic needs of pre-service educators in rural communities, post-Covid. A focus on perspectives of need gained through rural high school teachers, pre-service education students, and college and university faculty will be presented as guiding the development of student support profiles.</p>

Breakout 3: Thursday, 10:00 am - 10:50 am

Chino B	<p><i>Elaine (Lanie) Wilson, University of Pittsburgh - Johnstown; Mark Conlon, University of Pittsburgh - Johnstown</i></p> <p>Democracy Includes Everyone: Service-Learning That Gives Rural Students with Disabilities a Voice</p> <p>This session highlights a cross-curricular collaboration that prepares pre-service teachers to design inclusive citizenship and service-learning instruction for rural students with disabilities ages 12–22 through the BEACON Program (Building Educational Access, Community Outreach, and Networks) and the American Civics Education and Literacy (ACE) Initiative.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Pamina Abkowitz, St. Bonaventure University; Rene' Garrison, St. Bonaventure University; Adam Brown, St. Bonaventure University</i></p> <p>Examining Growth in Professional Competencies at Two Points in a Teacher Preparation Program</p> <p>This presentation examines the development of special education teacher candidates' competencies defined by the Council for Exceptional Children standards across two points in their program: an introductory lesson design course and the student teaching experience. Using rubrics to assess, we compare candidates' ability to design, implement, and reflect upon instruction that meets diverse needs.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Kim Muschaweck, Georgia College & State University; Stephen Wills, Georgia College & State University</i></p> <p>Building Capacity Through Instructional Coaching Within Graduate Programs</p> <p>Special educators work in varied positions necessitating the provision of instructional coaching from others with similar experiences. Components of an instructional coaching program implemented across graduate programs will be shared including: a coaching framework, resources & tools, and measurements of professional growth and challenges that address special education teacher retention.</p>
	1 Ethics CEU
Andreas	<p><i>Kim Floyd, West Virginia University, Alex Hollo, West Virginia University</i></p> <p>A Behavior-Analytic Approach to Safe Zone Training in Rural Settings</p> <p>This session frames Safe Zone training through a behavior-analytic and ethics-centered lens, focusing on observable practices and environmental arrangements in rural contexts. The session is designed to support BCBA's seeking continuing education credit and to provide practical strategies for creating psychologically safe environments across rural educational and service systems.</p>
	Shared Session (two brief talks on a related topic)
Santa Rosa	<p>1. <i>Robin Tabor, University of Louisville</i></p> <p>Resources for Families on Waiting List for ABA</p> <p>The presenter will provide an analysis of free or low-cost training on basic behavior skills. Providing a side-by-side comparison of each evidence-based, research-backed training platform.</p> <p>2. <i>Nicholas A. Newton, University of Louisville</i></p> <p>Teaching students to identify problems</p> <p>This session describes a dissertation study and initial results. The dissertation focus is on using academic standards as a vehicle of instruction for functional life skills in a rural high school. Functional life skills instruction has a positive impact on student transitions past school-age services.</p>
	Roundtables session 1: Attendees change tables every 20 minutes
Ballroom	<p>1. <i>Janell Pycior, Elise Murray, Jill Raisor, University of Southern Indiana</i></p> <p>Creative ideas across programs areas for recruitment and retention in rural schools</p> <p>The presenters will discuss recruitment ideas for early childhood teachers and retention ideas for elementary and special education teachers. In particular, we will focus on recruitment and retention for rural areas. Participants will engage in an in-depth presentation from all three majors and share ideas (which are working!) with colleagues.</p> <p>2. <i>Yen Pham, University of New Mexico</i></p> <p>You Have to Want to Come Here: Rural District Perspective on Teacher Residencies</p> <p>New Mexico's teaching workforce is shaped by geography, history, culture, and labor. Teacher residency has emerged as an important strategy for strengthening the educator pipeline. We interviewed district leaders in rural and urban areas to investigate how they address staffing needs. Residency is one strategy that intersects with, but does not fully resolve, the multifaceted needs of districts.</p>

Breakout 4: Thursday, 11:00 am - 11:50 am

Chino A	<p><i>Karen Koehler, Shawnee State University, Emily Maginn, SCOESC, Abby White, ODBES, Molley Hayes, BCESC</i></p> <p>Envisioning Success: Summer Camps for Children with Low Incidence Sensory Disabilities</p> <p>Participants will learn about two summer camps for children with low incidence sensory disabilities in rural Ohio. These camps combine fun and recreation with opportunities for children to work on life skills and transition activities that will empower them for future success. The camps create and utilize partnerships to provide services and resources for parents and educators.</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Jason Robinson, Florida Gulf Coast University; Tracy Gershwin, University of Northern Colorado; Laura Trapp, University of Northern Colorado</i></p> <p>Maintaining Safety and Promoting Dignity: Crisis Response Plans for Students in Rural Schools</p> <p>This session is intended to provide rural educators with recommendations for maintaining safety and protecting student dignity when writing and implementing crisis response plans. These recommendations include reducing student agitation by recognizing and responding to early signs of escalated student behaviors, embedding choice-making opportunities, and using verbal de-escalation strategies.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Michelle Rasheed, University of South Carolina Aiken; Melissa Martin, University of South Carolina Aiken; Falcone Dunlap, University of South Carolina Aiken</i></p> <p>Literacy Collaborations: Preparing Rural Educators to Teach Learners with Intellectual Disabilities</p> <p>This session highlights a literacy collaboration that prepares preservice teachers—many from rural areas—to support students with intellectual disabilities, develop differentiated instruction skills, and foster meaningful literacy experiences in rural classrooms.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Annemarie L. Horn, Radford University; Christine Powell, Radford University</i></p> <p>Employing a “Practice Makes Permanent” Mindset in Rural Teacher Preparation: One University’s Model</p> <p>This presentation highlights key elements of preservice training at a rural university that won the 2025 ACRES Exemplary Rural Special Education Program Award. Through three semesters of internship, preservice teachers engage in repeated practice-based learning opportunities in general and special education settings as they work towards licensure in Elementary Education and Special Education.</p>
	1 Learning CEU
Andreas	<p><i>Julie Atwood, University of Oklahoma</i></p> <p>Plans in Practice: Supporting Behavior Intervention Plan Implementation in Rural Schools</p> <p>This presentation will provide an overview on the implementation of behavior intervention plans, common barriers and potential solutions for educators, administrators and other school personnel. Presenters will discuss tools and interventions to effectively and efficiently support educators implementing behavior plans in rural schools.</p>



Keynote Address and Luncheon, 12:00 pm – 1:25 pm

Dr. Alecia Blackwood

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Education and Counseling

“The Human-Centric Oasis: Understanding How to Use GenAI to Thrive in Rural Special Education”

Dr. Alecia Blackwood is an author, consultant, coach, facilitator, and international speaker with more than 25 years of experience in K–12 and higher education. She is a former Fulbright–Hays Scholar to Namibia and Botswana and is recognized as one of the leading experts in the United States on Ubuntu (oo-boon-too) pedagogy, a humanistic approach that fosters student engagement, community, and meaningful learning.

Dr. Blackwood was selected as a 2024 International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Faculty Research Fellow, where she explores the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in school environments. She was also recently named a 2026 AI Catalyst Fellow by the EdSAFE AI Alliance, recognizing her leadership in advancing responsible and human-centered uses of AI in education.

She currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Education at Longwood University in rural Virginia. Outside of work, Dr. Blackwood enjoys cooking and yoga

Breakout 5: Thursday, 1:30 pm - 2:20 pm

Chino A	<p><i>Connie McReynolds, Morningstar Educational and Psychological Services</i> A Groundbreaking Lens on Classroom Behavior: Uncovering Hidden Barriers to Learning Offering an innovative perspective on classroom behavior, this session draws on more than 16 years of work with students and schools to show how classroom behaviors can signal whether instruction is truly landing. Participants gain a clear framework and concrete strategies to adjust instruction, so more rural students succeed in inclusive general education classrooms.</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Jacquelyn Purser, University of Oklahoma</i> Coaching Paraprofessionals on Data Collection Accuracy: A Single-Case Design Study This session will provide detailed coaching strategies the rural special education teacher can put into practice to train and manage paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities in the special and general education environment. Tips will be provided on time-and cost-effective coaching characteristics and how to provide coaching during the school day.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Danielle Dietz, East Carolina University</i> Building Capacity Through Rural Teacher Residency Preparatory Programs This session shares findings from a residency teacher preparation initiative focused on community building, culturally responsive teaching, leadership, and confidence-building for rural educators working with students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Participants will explore strategies, data insights, and implications for rural teachers of special education students.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Silvia M. Correa-Torres, University of Northern Colorado, Tracy Gershwin, University of Northern Colorado</i> Generative AI for Inclusive Teaching: Practical Tools for Rural Special Educators This session explores how teachers in rural schools can use generative AI tools as virtual assistants to save time, personalize instruction, and support diverse learners. Participants will examine practical, ethical, and creative applications that make AI a realistic ally for rural special educators.</p>
Santa Rosa	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel Session</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Ginevra Courtade, University of Louisville</i> Panel: <i>Kera Ackerman, University of Kentucky; Brittany Hott, University of Oklahoma; David Hoppey, University of North Florida; Todd Sundeen, University of Northern Colorado.</i> Turning Adversity into Action: Advocacy in Difficult Political Landscapes Advocacy is never easy, but in today’s political climate it can feel especially daunting. Moments of challenge also present opportunities for meaningful change. Participants will explore advocacy strategies. Emphasis will be placed on resilience, adaptability, and the power of collective action. Attendees will leave with renewed confidence to sustain momentum.</p>

	<p>Help us pick the conference theme for ACRES 2027 in Chattanooga, TN</p> <p>Vote on your favorites at the Keynote Lunch and Town Hall Reception</p> <p>Don’t let your pick get eliminated from the Elite 8! Winning theme to be announced at the Awards Lunch.</p>
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- Themes**
- A. Bridging the Divide: Building Equity & Excellence in Rural Special Education
 - B. All Aboard! Finding Your Voice in Rural Special Education
 - C. Beyond Chatt-er: Catalyzing Action in Rural Special Education
 - D. Full Steam Ahead: Powering Rural Special Education into the Future
 - E. Get on Board the Rural Express! Next Stop, Excellence in Special Education
 - F. On Track & In Motion: Advancing Special Education in Rural Communities
 - G. On the Right Track: Navigating Best Practices in Rural Special Education
 - H. Same Train, Same Track: Strengthening Our Rural Special Education Community

Breakout 6: Thursday, 2:30 pm - 3:20 pm

Chino A	<p><i>Wendy Stewman, Black Hills State University</i></p> <p>From Trauma to Triumph: Developing Executive Function Skills in Inclusive Classrooms</p> <p>This session explores how to support children in rural settings impacted by trauma in developing executive functioning skills. Presenters will share evidence-based strategies for executive functioning development focused on self-regulation and reasoning skills. Participants will explore barriers and bridges to implementing proactive strategies to build a trauma-invested learning environment</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Callie Welch, Tennessee Tech University</i></p> <p>Every Picture Tells a Story: Using Canva to Create Visual Supports</p> <p>Visuals can transform your classroom, and, with Canva, creating them might be easier than ever. Join this interactive session to explore practical ways to design visual supports that boost understanding, independence, and engagement for all learners in your classroom. You'll walk away from this session with ideas, tips, and ready-made templates that you can put into practice.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Julie Atwood, University of Oklahoma; Sarah Heiniger, University of Oklahoma; Brittany Hott, University of Oklahoma</i></p> <p>Building our Oasis: Fostering Educator Growth in Rural Schools</p> <p>This presentation will share an overview of three projects aimed at supporting rural educator preparation and professional development. Presenters will discuss the development of the PRIME supervision, CREATE PD, and BOOST models, including the technology tools and resources used, data relating to participant progress, and lessons learned during the first years of the projects.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Tiffiney Smith, Southeast Missouri Regional Professional Development Center, Southeast Missouri State University; Jeanne Rothermel, Special Education Consultant</i></p> <p>From Compliance to Impact: Using Educational Benefit Reviews to Improve IEPs and Student Outcomes</p> <p>Rural schools face unique challenges in special education. This session highlights the Educational Benefit Review (EBR) process, noted by the National Center for Systemic Improvement, as an effective practice to improve IEP quality and outcomes. Participants will learn how EBR weaves IDEA's "Golden Thread" with the Endrew F. standard to ensure IEPs are both compliant and student focused.</p>
Ballroom	<p style="text-align: center;">Round Table Session 3</p> <p>1. <i>Kristin Martin, University of New Mexico; Yen Pham, University of New Mexico</i></p> <p>What does quality of life look like for individuals with disabilities in rural communities?</p> <p>Individuals in rural settings have unique needs and goals that are distinctively different from their peers in urban settings. This calls for a closer examination of what quality of life (QOL) means for individuals with disabilities in rural communities. We investigate QOL frameworks through the lens of a place-based critical pedagogy to recommend a rural-focused approach to transition planning.</p> <p>2. <i>Elizabeth Wilkins, University of Southern Indiana; Mary Ann Cahill, University of Southern Indiana</i></p> <p>Increasing Access to High-Quality Educational Resources for Rural Educators</p> <p>Grounded in sociocultural, situated learning, adult learning, and equity-based theories, the initiative recognizes that effective teaching in rural contexts requires relevant resources, collaborative networks, and support systems that honor the cultural and geographic realities of rural communities.</p>

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Did you know?

The ACRES logo features a bald eagle flying with wings spread, a symbol of independence and strength soaring above a broad range of rural spaces, the embodiment of the organization's spirit, determination, and commitment to its rural mission.

Breakout 7: Thursday, 3:30 pm - 4:20 pm

Chino A	<p><i>Todd Sundeen, University of Northern Colorado</i> Teachers' Dilemma During School Shootings: The Critical Question The prevalence of school shootings across the U.S. has ignited a contentious dilemma for classroom teachers when confronted with the prospect of a shooter entering their school. This session examines teachers' roles and responsibilities related to active shooter incidents. We will address and invite your discussion on the question that teachers must consider: Self-Sacrifice or Self-Preservation?</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Heather Nudd, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga; Patrick Morin, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga</i> Effective and Low-Cost Behavior Supports for Rural Schools This interactive session will equip parents and school practitioners with free and low-cost, evidence-based strategies to address challenging behaviors in rural settings. Participants will learn practical universal and targeted behavior interventions, explore online tools and resources, and discover ways to leverage community partnerships to strengthen behavioral supports.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Dr. Sarah Chesney, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown; Dr. Lanie Wilson, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown</i> Theory to Practice: STEM in Action in the Inclusive Classroom The most authentic experiences in teacher preparation bridge theory to practice. Learn about how student teachers utilize the STEM Learning Framework as a model for inclusive teaching and learning. We will showcase practical classroom experiences of the Framework in action and solutions for making inclusion a reality.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Vickie Fairchild, Ed.D., Governing Board Member, SCUSD</i> Dissecting Trust in the IEP Process Trust is often lacking in partnerships between parents and educators during the individual education plan (IEP) process and can negatively affect children with special needs. This workshop will dissect the aspects of a trusting relationship with parents. Participants will gain awareness and skills to improve their relationships with parents.</p>
Santa Rosa	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel Session</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Charla Chailland, Florida Gulf Coast University</i> Panel: <i>Charla Chailland, Florida Gulf Coast University; Jason Robinson, Florida Gulf Coast University; Ben Gallegos, Florida Gulf Coast University</i> Rurality, Disability, and Multilingualism: Supporting ELs With Disabilities Across Contexts This session examines the experiences of English Learners with disabilities in rural Indiana and Florida. Presenters will analyze mixed-methods data, instructional practices, and preparation structures, offering strategies to strengthen effective teaching, collaboration, and decision-making in rural schools.</p>
Ballroom	<p style="text-align: center;">Round Table Session 4</p> <p>1. <i>Alice Tesch Graham, Salve Regina University</i> High-Leverage Practices: Student Teacher Reflections Implications for Teacher Preparation The presenter will share a multi-year research study where special education student teachers reflected on successes and challenges. This data was coded against high-leverage practices. The participants will review the findings and discuss the implications for our teacher preparation programs and teacher retention.</p> <p>2. <i>Melissa Martin, University of South Carolina Aiken; Carol Falcone Dunlap, University of South Carolina Aiken; Michelle Rasheed, University of South Carolina Aiken; Skylar Shirey, University of South Carolina Aiken</i> Maximizing the Mentorship Model: Providing Mutually Beneficial Experiences for Students Comprehensive Transition Postsecondary programs provide supports in academics, employment, and independent living for students with intellectual disabilities. They provide the college experience and development of same-aged friendships. Presenters will describe the development of a mentorship model, and the mutually beneficial experiences provided to college students with and without disabilities</p>

All are welcome at the Town Hall Meeting & Welcome Reception!

4:30 pm on the Date restaurant patio

Please join us for a brief information session before the social gathering.

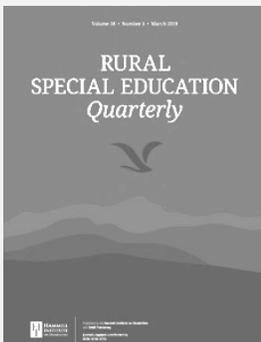
Light hors d'oeuvres are on us; beer, wine, and spirits are available for purchase.

FRIDAY, March 27, 2026

6:45 am – 7:45 am	<p>Breakfast will be served in the Catalina-Medera Ballroom</p> <p>Be sure to check on your silent auction bids and stop by the exhibitors' tables before the last session today!</p>
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Breakout 8: Friday, 8:00 am – 8:50 am

Chino A	<p><i>Mary Anne Fleury, Black Hills State University</i></p> <p>From Attendance to Leadership: General Educators as Active Partners in the IEP Process</p> <p>The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '04) requires general educators to attend IEP meetings but attendance alone does not guarantee collaboration or participation. This session moves beyond compliance to explore how general educators can transition from passive participants to active leaders within the IEP process.</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Kristie Jones, Purdue University</i></p> <p>Thriving Through Challenges: Insights into Burnout & Renewal in Rural Special Education Teachers</p> <p>Rural special education teachers (SETs) face unique challenges that increase their vulnerability to burnout. Building on prior research this presentation moves beyond research to focus on actionable solutions for administrators and SETs. The presenter will share a brief overview of the study's key findings and practical strategies to reduce burnout and provide a sense of renewal in rural SETs.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Jason Robinson, Florida Gulf Coast University; Tracy Gershwin, University of Northern Colorado; Laura Trapp, University of Northern Colorado</i></p> <p>More than a course: Embedding behavior management strategies throughout teacher preparation programs</p> <p>This presentation will outline recommendations for embedding strategies for responding to challenging student behaviors throughout teacher preparation programs as part of a spiral curriculum, thereby preparing pre-service teachers to meet the behavioral support needs of their students in a proactive and minimally restrictive manner within inclusive school settings.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Tiffany Wild, The Ohio State University; Aubry Fowler, The Ohio State University Extension Fairfield County Educator</i></p> <p>Promising Practices in Agriculture Education: Highlighting Students with Disabilities in Action</p> <p>This session will provide attendees with case studies of youth with disabilities participating in agriculture education. The session will highlight the successes and challenges presented to youth with various disabilities as they show livestock, participate in supervised agricultural education experiences, and school experiences within formal agriculture education programs.</p>
Andreas	<p>1 Learning CEU</p>
	<p><i>Bre Martin, University of Oklahoma</i></p> <p>Increasing Trauma-Informed Applied Behavior Analysis in Public Schools: A Multiple Baseline Study</p> <p>This study will examine whether brief trauma-informed training for school counselors increases their use and confidence with trauma-informed behavioral strategies in grade-level social skills groups. Findings will highlight practical methods to support children affected by trauma and suggest ways schools can support students and educators.</p>



Share Your Work! Publish in *Rural Special Education Quarterly*

Rural Special Education Quarterly invites conference participants to submit a manuscript sharing their work with others in the field. *RSEQ* is a respected, national, peer-reviewed, professional journal published quarterly for over 30 years.

Find an overview of the journal and the submission guidelines on the ACRES website at <http://acres-sped.org/journal>

Breakout 9: Friday, 9:00 am - 9:50 am

Chino B	<p><i>Lauren Garletts, James Madson University</i></p> <p>Supporting Regulation in Rural Classrooms: Nervous System Tools and Behavior Awareness</p> <p>This session explores how educators can use nervous system-friendly tools to support student regulation and recognize the difference between stress responses and intentional behavior. Participants will learn practical strategies for creating safe, responsive classrooms that foster engagement and reduce misinterpretation of student actions.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Amanda Bowers, University of Oklahoma; Mia Dianda, University of Oklahoma</i></p> <p>Data Made Easy: Empowering Paraprofessionals with Simple Data Collection Tools</p> <p>Data collection is essential in guiding instructional and behavioral decisions for students. Paraprofessionals are often tasked with implementing data collection methods despite limited training. This session will introduce simple, time efficient data collection tools that paraprofessionals can implement across a variety of classroom settings.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Amanda Hardin, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga; Patrick Morin, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga; Heather Nudd, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga</i></p> <p>RAIL System: Providing Resources and Fostering Hope for Rural Schools</p> <p>Rural school districts face significant barriers, including limited access to assessments, interventions, and resources, can impact student outcomes and service delivery. This session highlights these challenges and introduces the Rural Assessment and Intervention Library (RAIL) System—an innovative model providing rural educators free access to tools and resources to promote educational equity.</p>
Andreas	<p><i>Patricia Peterson, Northern Arizona University</i></p> <p>Culturally Environmentally Relevant STEAM Activities Empowering Rural Diverse Exceptional Learners</p> <p>University students and faculty showcase inclusive STEAM activities empowering rural culturally diverse exceptional and typical learners. Audience learns how focus on diversity and equity integrates STEAM within contexts of Indigenous, Latinx, and other cultural ways of knowing. Audience can replicate STEAM materials/strategies serving rural diverse exceptional learners in their own local schools.</p>
Santa Rosa	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel Session</p> <p>Moderator: <i>J. Matt Jameson University of Utah</i></p> <p>Panel: <i>Mark Butler Anderson University, Channon Horn, Anderson University</i></p> <p>Navigating Change: Challenges and Opportunities for Education and Special Education Departments</p> <p>Colleges of Education and Special Education departments face rapid change as state and federal priorities shift, accountability pressures change, teacher shortages persist, and evolving licensure demand reshaping of/in IHEs. This panel brings together academic leaders to explore challenges, opportunities, and strategies for sustaining strong special educator preparation programs.</p>
Ballroom	<p style="text-align: center;">Round Table Session 5</p> <p>1. <i>Heather Hayes, Northwestern College</i></p> <p>The Implementation of UDL: Supporting Teachers in Rural Classrooms</p> <p>Universal Design for Learning provides teachers with proactive and meaningful ways to ensure all students are a part of the general education curriculum. This presentation will share how a general education teacher in a rural school learned about and implemented UDL in the classroom including steps that other teachers might take to implement UDL in their own classroom.</p> <p>2. <i>Sheri Berkeley, George Mason University</i></p> <p>Reading Fundamentals for Rural Schools: The 4 “Ps” of Comprehension Instruction</p> <p>Proficient readers actively engage with text through questioning and comprehension monitoring. Teachers need to explicitly teach struggling readers, including students with language-based learning disabilities, to approach text in the purposeful and strategic ways used by good readers. This session will demonstrate evidence-based instructional practices for improving reading comprehension.</p>

Thank you for being part of ACRES 2026! We look forward to connecting with you online.

Tell us “Why I Attended ACRES 2026” to be eligible to win a prize on Day 2!

#ACRES2026

#SpecialEducation

Breakout 10: Friday, 10:00 am - 10:50 am

Chino A	<p><i>Joshua Baker University of Nevada, Las Vegas</i> Using Open Educational Practices and Resources to Improve Access to Science Education This presentation explores how Open Educational Practices (OEP) and Resources (OER) can be leveraged to make science education more accessible and inclusive for students with extensive support needs. The NVGCA at UNLV has developed guidelines that provide a practical framework for designing grade-level, standards- aligned science lessons.</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Cathy Galyon, East Tennessee State University</i> Practical and Ethical AI Approaches for Faster Course Creation, Research Support, and Student Skill Development This session will present ethical ways to use AI in the college classroom. The topics will include ideas to shorten the time to create course materials and research. Additionally, the session will give free AI websites for students and professionals already in the field and to use AI ethically as well.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Kelly Anderson, UNC Charlotte; Sejal Parikh Foxx, UNC Charlotte</i> Responding to students with behavior, mental health, and trauma challenges in rural schools The purpose of this session is for special education and counseling graduate students and their faculty mentors to share experiences and outcomes of interdisciplinary professional training focused on ABA, mental health, and trauma-informed practices. Faculty mentors will discuss the behavioral and mental health benefits of shared training for K-12 students in rural and urban areas.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Heather Volchko, Threshold Learning; Eryn Van Acker, TLC Nonprofit</i> Doing More with Less: Virtual Expertise for Rural Tier 3 Mental Health and Intensive Intervention Rural administrators will explore a partnership model that uses virtual Tier 3 mental health expertise to address intensive student needs, centering virtual partnerships to advance and sustain existing staff. Key implementation science drivers, emerging data, case vignettes, and practical planning tools will be used to help map local gaps and plan concrete next steps to expand local capacity.</p>
Andreas	<p style="text-align: center;">1 Learning CEU</p> <p><i>Julie Atwood, University of Oklahoma; Bre Martin, University of Oklahoma</i> Saved by the Bell: OBM Strategies for Teacher Retention and School Improvement Instead of expensive consultants, rural leaders need practical systems. This session applies Organizational Behavior Management (OBM) to create a leader's toolkit. We focus on low-cost actions to build trust. Attendees will learn to identify staff needs and improve teacher retention by maximizing existing resources.</p>
Ballroom	<p style="text-align: center;">Round Table Session 6</p> <p>1. <i>Stacy Weiss, East Carolina University</i> The Challenge of Balance: Tailoring Alternative Licensure Programs Amid Expanding Pressures This discussion will share the growing pains of an alternative licensure special education program that has shifted from a post-baccalaureate program with limited requirements to a formalized certificate program. The benefits and challenges will be shared as we strive to meet state and university requirements while focusing on the unique needs of K-12 special education teachers in rural areas.</p> <p>2. <i>Jill Storch, University of Tampa; Lisa Delgado Brown, University of Tampa</i> Development of a New Online Teacher Preparation Program in Exceptional Student Education The purpose of this presentation is to share essential components, objectives, and outcomes for online course development in special education teacher preparation programs. The primary objective of the presentation is to demonstrate how online teacher preparation programs can systematically plan and integrate high leverage practices through coursework and simulation opportunities.</p>



**Check us out on
Social Media!**

**#ACRES2026
#SpecialEducation**



@acres_rural_special_ed

Breakout 11: Friday, 11:00 am - 11:50 am

Pueblo A	<p><i>Tori Colson, University of Southern Indiana, Elise Murray, University of Southern Indiana; Janell Pycior, University of Southern Indiana</i></p> <p>Making Rural Literacy Practicum Viable: Technology-Enhanced Supervision Across Dispersed Placements</p> <p>Two university instructors managing literacy-focused practicum placements across 22 school sites share how GoReact, with AI feedback, makes geographically dispersed supervision viable. This practitioner-focused session demonstrates the hybrid supervision model, explores technology considerations, and discusses implications for expanding rural special education placements.</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Kelly L. Majewski, Texas A&M University</i></p> <p>Innovation in Rural Texas</p> <p>Capacity Building Conferences have been held across the state of Texas to formulate solutions and foster relationships between school districts and Texas Workforce Commission - Vocational Rehabilitation. It has become evident that students in rural areas receive limited services in the area of transition.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Danene Fast, The Ohio State University; Tiffany Wild, The Ohio State University</i></p> <p>Thriving in Rural Education: Universal Strategies Inspired by Teaching Kids with Visual Impairments</p> <p>Teaching in rural schools requires creative strategies to support diverse learners with limited resources. This session shares practical approaches inspired by tools for students with visual impairments that benefit all learners. Participants will gain resources for engagement, accessibility, and inclusion in any classroom.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Cara Wilmot, University of North Florida</i></p> <p>Fostering Reading: Review of a College Bridge Program for High School Students</p> <p>Learn about a formative program evaluation of a summer College Bridge Program for d/Dhh high school students. Using the CIPP model, it examines how individualized, research-based reading instruction through flexible grouping & high-dosage interventions impacts outcomes. Mixed-methods findings highlight culturally responsive materials, progress monitoring & SDI as key to equitable literacy growth.</p>
Andreas	<p style="text-align: center;">1 Learning CEU</p> <p><i>Kevin T. Muns</i></p> <p>Equipping Rural Paras to Teach Skills in Classrooms with Prompting via Teacher Instruction</p> <p>Teachers are often put in positions where they are expected to do more with less, often more so for rural teachers who require additional training materials, or face staffing difficulties. This presentation aims to increase the strategies of teacher training with their paraprofessionals and how these strategies can lead to increased outcomes for students.</p>
Santa Rosa	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel Session</p> <p>Moderator: Sarah Heiniger, Managing Editor, University of Oklahoma</p> <p>Panel: Brittany Hott, Executive Editor RSEQ, University of Oklahoma; Kera Ackerman, Associate Editor, University of Kentucky; Annemarie Horn, Associate Editor, Radford University; Julie Atwood, Managing Editor, University of Oklahoma</p> <p>Meet the Editors of RSEQ</p> <p>A panel including some of the editors of Rural Special Education Quarterly will demystify the publication process by answering commonly asked questions about the journal and the publication process, and give recommendations to avoid common pitfalls they see when editing manuscripts. There will also be an opportunity for questions and answers from the audience.</p>

Awards & Recognition Lunch

Friday, 12:00 pm – 1:25 pm, Catalina-Madera Ballroom

Congratulations to the 2026 Award Recipients!

The Eagle Award: *To be announced at the luncheon!*

The Kim and Kasey Floyd Social Justice Award: Dr. Sarah Howorth, University of Maine

Rural Special Education Quarterly Awards

Article of the Year: Sutter, C., Demchak, M., & Sundeen, T. (2025). Definitional issues of rural settings in special education research. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 44(3), 121-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/87568705251323255>

Reviewer of the Year: Stephanie Baker

Breakout 12: Friday, 1:30 pm - 2:20 pm

Chino A	<p><i>Dr. Michele DeBerry, University of Oklahoma; Dr. Amber Davis, University of Oklahoma</i> Supporting Students with Autism in Rural Classrooms: Practical, Inclusive Strategies That Work Learn practical, low-prep strategies to support students with autism in rural classrooms. This session shares simple tools to boost communication, social engagement, sensory regulation, and independence, helping teachers create inclusive routines where every student can participate and thrive.</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Joy Mahiko, University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu</i> Behind the Classroom Door: Understanding the Realities of Rural Special and General Educators This session examines inclusion in rural schools by revealing the working conditions of general and special educators. Using an adapted Working Conditions Survey(O'Brien et al., 2019), participants will compare teacher perceptions of workload, autonomy, and collaboration. Participants will contribute their ideas about the necessary supports to strengthen inclusion, teacher quality, and retention.</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Wendy Stewman, Black Hills State University; Mary Anne Fleury, Black Hills State University</i> Closing the Gap: A Hands-On Educational Lab for Rural Special Education Readiness Moving beyond theoretical knowledge and fostering practical application in the preparation of special education teachers, particularly in rural settings, can be a struggle. This presentation outlines the steps in the creation of an Educational Lab designed to close the theory-to-practice gap. This dedicated space provides pre-service teachers with essential resources to apply theory to practice.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Kinsey Wright, Nevada State University; Reva Mathieu, Duquesne University</i> Beyond the Myths: Redefining Public Perceptions Through Compassionate Behavior Science This session explores how teaching about Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) centered on a framework of compassionate care can redefine public perceptions and expand acceptance of behavioral services, especially in rural areas. Presenters will model strategies for integrating compassion, empathy, collaboration, and cultural responsiveness into ABA education and practice.</p>
Andreas	<p style="text-align: center;">1 Learning CEU</p> <p><i>Gretchen Scheibel, University of Kansas; Sarah Wilkinson, University of Southern Maine</i> Student Behavior in Rural Schools: The Need for Feasible & Effective Classroom Management Rural educators are likely to encounter challenging disruptive, behavior which can escalate into more severe behavior if classroom management strategies are not employed. This session will discuss the on-going behavior crisis and need for classroom management needs, and a classroom management intervention that can be used to prepare rural educators.</p>
Santa Rosa	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel Session</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Joanna Ryan, University of North Dakota</i> Panel: <i>Chevonne Sutter, University of Nevada - Reno; J. Matt Jameson, University of Utah; Brittany Hott, University of Oklahoma; Jared Stewart-Ginsburg, NC State University</i> Conducting High-Quality Rural Special Education Research: Insights From RSEQ Conducting High-Quality Rural Special Education Research: Insights From RSEQ brings together a panel of authors of articles related to using single-case, randomized control, survey, and qualitative methods in rural contexts. Panelists discuss methodological considerations, challenges, and innovations, framed by a critical examination of how "rural" is defined across research contexts.</p>

Reminder: THE SILENT AUCTION CLOSSES AT 4:00 p.m.

(during the poster session, right before the closing Board Meeting).

Come enjoy an afternoon snack while you chat with our poster presenters,
then head over to pick up the items you won!

Preferred payment methods: Ca\$h, check made out to ACRES.

Electronic payments (Venmo, Zelle, Cash App, PayPal) will be available.

Items must be paid and picked up by 4:30 or they will go to the next highest bidder.

Any items not picked up by 5:00 will be returned to ACRES HQ.

Breakout 13: Friday, 2:30 pm - 3:20 pm

Chino A	<p><i>Rachel Burley, The Ability Challenge; Krista Reed, The Ability Challenge</i> THRIVE: Practical Tools for Driving Special Education Quality in Rural Districts The session introduces the THRIVE Framework for Quality Special Education, which outlines 40 success indicators across five domains: Culture, Instruction, Mandates, Systems, and Family. Using a self-assessment, participants will examine their school’s practices, identify strengths and needs, and collaborate on next steps with tools to improve special education.</p>
Chino B	<p><i>Jill Storch, University of Tampa; Lisa Delgado Brown, University of Tampa,</i> Ground Up Development of An Online Master's Program for ESE Certification and Dyslexia Concentration Presenters and developers from The University of Tampa, a small private university, will share with participants the process for developing an online asynchronous Master's degree program in Exceptional Student Education with a concentration area in learning disabilities and dyslexia. The program development process, course alignment and development process will be shared</p>
Pueblo A	<p><i>Karin Strohmyer, Buena Vista University, Daniel Strohmyer, Buena Vista University, Jaden Swarts, Buena Vista University</i> Impact of International Teaching Experiences on Pre-service Teacher Readiness This session explores how a rural midwestern university has implemented sustainable international teaching practicums to enhance pre-service teachers’ cultural competence, global awareness, and readiness for diverse classrooms. Research, program pathways, student reflections, and collaboration strategies for implementing similar experiences will be shared.</p>
Pueblo B	<p><i>Louise Yoho, Southern Illinois University; Stephanie Baker, Northern Illinois University</i> Scaffolding Teacher Learning with AI: Supporting Preservice Special Educators in Transition Planning This study examined AI as a pedagogical tool to support preservice special educators (PSEs) in creating equity-centered individual transition plans (ITPs). Working with case studies, 34 PSEs at two universities used AI feedback to improve ITP clarity, specificity, and alignment. Findings suggest AI can scaffold learning, enhance creativity, and complement mentorship in teacher preparation.</p>

ACRES is pleased to announce the poster presentation awards recognizing outstanding contributions to rural special education. These awards honor presenters engaging in innovative research and practice that results in improved outcomes for students with disabilities in rural communities.

Research Poster Award

Rural Practice Poster Award

RISE Poster Award: Rural Innovation in Special Education

**Poster Session and Social
Friday, 3:20 pm – 4:50 pm**

1	<p><i>Stephanie Baker, Northern Illinois University; Louise Yoho, Southern Illinois University</i> Transition Planning in Rural Schools: Barriers, Strengths, and Strategies for Meaningful ITPs This study explores the challenges and strengths of transition planning for students with disabilities in rural communities. Survey data from rural Illinois educators reveal barriers such as limited resources and personnel, as well as strengths like strong family involvement. Findings highlight strategies to enhance meaningful ITPs in rural settings.</p>
2	<p><i>Juliana Rossetti, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown; Shallyn Shank, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown</i> BEACON in Action: Illuminating Transition for Students and Future Teachers The BEACON (Building Educational Access, Community Outreach, and Networks) Program equips transition-aged students with disabilities with life and workplace skills while preparing preservice teachers through authentic teaching. Its layered mentorship model fosters collaboration, leadership, and inclusive practice, benefiting both students and emerging educators.</p>

Poster session, Continued

3	<p><i>Larry B. Fisher, Western Carolina University</i> Empowering Rural Educator Prep Through Case-Based Learning and JCLEL Resources Learn how JCLEL case studies enrich teacher preparation, especially in rural programs with limited access to diverse classrooms and students with extensive support needs. The presenter will share strategies for integrating articles into coursework, provide access to recent journal issues, and guide participants in creating and submitting their own case studies.</p>
4	<p><i>Stacey Murray, University of Southern Indiana</i> From Isolation to Inclusion: Leveraging Virtual Tools to Support Rural Students with Disabilities This session shows how teacher prep programs can equip pre-service teachers to support students with disabilities in virtual settings, especially in rural areas. Participants will learn to adapt evidence-based practices, engage students online, collaborate with families, and gain resources to prepare future teachers for inclusive virtual instruction.</p>
5	<p><i>Skylar Shirey, Melissa Martin, Dr. Michelle Rasheed, Carol Falcone Dunlap, University of South Carolina Aiken</i> Attitudes Toward Disabilities in Higher Ed: Promoting Inclusive Learning for All Researchers will present a 90-minute campus workshop on disabilities (e.g., dyslexia) and learning considerations (e.g., ADHD). The session covers workshop design, barriers to implementation, and the impact on the attitudes toward people with disabilities.</p>
6	<p><i>Robin K. Tabor, University of Louisville</i> Empowering Parents on ABA Waitlist Due to the shortage of board-certified behavior analysts (BCBAs) across the country, and especially in rural areas. Families need resources and assistance to start early intervention during the crucial years while waiting for a service provider.</p>
7	<p><i>Elise Murray, University of Southern Indiana</i> Examining the Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Pre-Service Teachers towards Assistive Technology This poster presentation shares results from a quasi-experimental study that gave preservice teachers hands-on experience with assistive technology. The study explored how these experiences influenced their self-efficacy in using such tools. Attendees will learn key findings and gain strategies to better prepare teachers to integrate assistive technology.</p>
8	<p><i>Michelle Pierce, Texas A&M University</i> Who Is Teaching Rural Students with Disabilities? Understanding Certification, Shortages, & Pathways This poster examines national and Texas-specific trends in special education teacher certification, preparation routes, and shortage indicators. Using state and national databases, it highlights gaps in teacher qualifications, the rise of alternative pathways, and implications for rural districts facing persistent staffing challenges.</p>
9	<p><i>Michael Green, Jr., University of North Florida</i> Experiences of SWD and Their Families in Accessing Community Transition Supports in Rural Settings This poster presents a hermeneutic phenomenological study of access to community transition supports after high school for students with significant disabilities in rural Florida as experienced by families. I will discuss central themes, implications for practice, and recommendations for ways to enhance transition pathways in rural communities.</p>
10	<p><i>Ashleigh Hayward, Vanderbilt University</i> Reading Comprehension Skills of Third and Fourth Graders in a Rural School District Children in rural communities face unique educational challenges. This study investigated the prevalence of reading profiles for third and fourth graders in the rural Southeastern United States. Research questions: (1) What is the prevalence of each reading profile based on word reading and reading comprehension composites? (2) Does the pattern of reading profiles differ with subtest scores?</p>
11	<p><i>Adam Bilinsky, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown; Melissa Casses, University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown</i> Understanding post-covid pre-service educator needs in rural context This session will present an exploratory mixed-method study that examines the biopsychosocial and academic needs of pre-service educators in rural communities, post-Covid. A particular focus on perspectives of need gained through rural high school teachers, pre-service education students, and college and university faculty will be presented as guiding the development of student support profiles.</p>
12	<p><i>Jenny Hogg, University of Louisville</i> From Prompt to Plan: Using Generative AI for Career Exploration for SWDs This study explores the potential of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) as an accessible, low-cost tool to improve career exploration and student agency. In a single-case multiple-probe design study, a high school teacher implemented a task-analyzed instructional sequence to teach students with intellectual disabilities to prompt GenAI for career exploration.</p>

Post-Conference Open Board Meeting
Immediately following the poster session at 5:00

Everyone is welcome to attend!
The Board would love to hear your ideas for ACRES and welcome our new Board Members and Officers

ACRES Executive Board

Officers 2026-2027	Members at Large	Term Expires
Annmarie Horn, President	Mark Butler	2027*
Joanna Ryan, President - Elect	Chris Closson	2027*
Todd Sundeen, Past President	Colleen Wood-Fields	2027*
Jared Stewart-Ginsburg, Secretary*	Stephanie Baker	2028*
Mary Anne Fleury, Treasurer	Cindy Baughan	2028*
Cathy Galyon, Historian	Christine Powell	2028*
Brittany Hott, Apprentice Historian	Channon Horn	2028*
	Pamina Abkowitz	2029*
	Tori Colson	2029*
	Elise Murray	2029*
RSEQ	Headquarters Co-Directors	Student Member
Brittany Hott, Editor	Kim Floyd	Kaleigh Pickett
Julie Atwood & Sarah Heiniger, Managing Editors	Alex Hollo	

*First term. Members at Large can only serve two consecutive terms and then must sit out one year before seeking election.

Ready to get more involved with ACRES?

Make the most of your membership by staying informed, connecting with others, and contributing to meaningful initiatives. At the Town Hall Meeting, our Historian will share work of the committees and their key accomplishments from the past year. Explore the different committees to find one that aligns with your interests and skills. Sign-ups will be available at the Old Timers/New Comers reception. All are welcome to participate and help shape the future of our organization!

Standing committees may include

- (1) Exemplary Program Awards and Student Scholarship Committee
- (2) the Conference Teacher Event Committee
- (3) the Social Media and Communications Committee
- (4) the Budget and Financial Oversight Committee
- (5) the Membership Committee
- (6) the Nominations and Elections Committee
- (7) the Partnerships Committee
- (8) Research Committee
- (9) RuralLink Practitioner Newsletter Editorial Team

ACRES 2026 Social Media Giveaway

Join us online and enter to win a special prize at the end of Day 2!

How to Enter:

1. Follow us on Instagram and Facebook.
 Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/acres_rural_special_ed/
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ACRESRuralSPED>
2. Find and LIKE our post titled, "Why I Attended ACRES 2026"
3. Comment on the post and tell us why YOU are attending ACRES 2026.
 Be sure to add **#ACRES2026 #SpecialEducation** in your post!

Important Details:

- All three steps must be completed by noon of Day 2.
- One entry per person.
- Prizes will be announced at the Welcome Breakfast
- Winner will be announced at the close of the Poster Session.

#EddieTheEagleGoesRural

#ACRES2026



Share the wonderful sessions and activities you're enjoying in sunny Palm Springs!
 Post a picture or video with Eddie the Eagle during the conference.
 Add **#ACRES2026 #SpecialEducation** to show your support for rural special education!

Please take your Eddie the Eagle home after the conference
 and keep the ACRES energy going all year!

Continue to post pictures or videos of Eddie in your classrooms and communities,
 Be sure to tag your post with **#EddieTheEagleGoesRural**

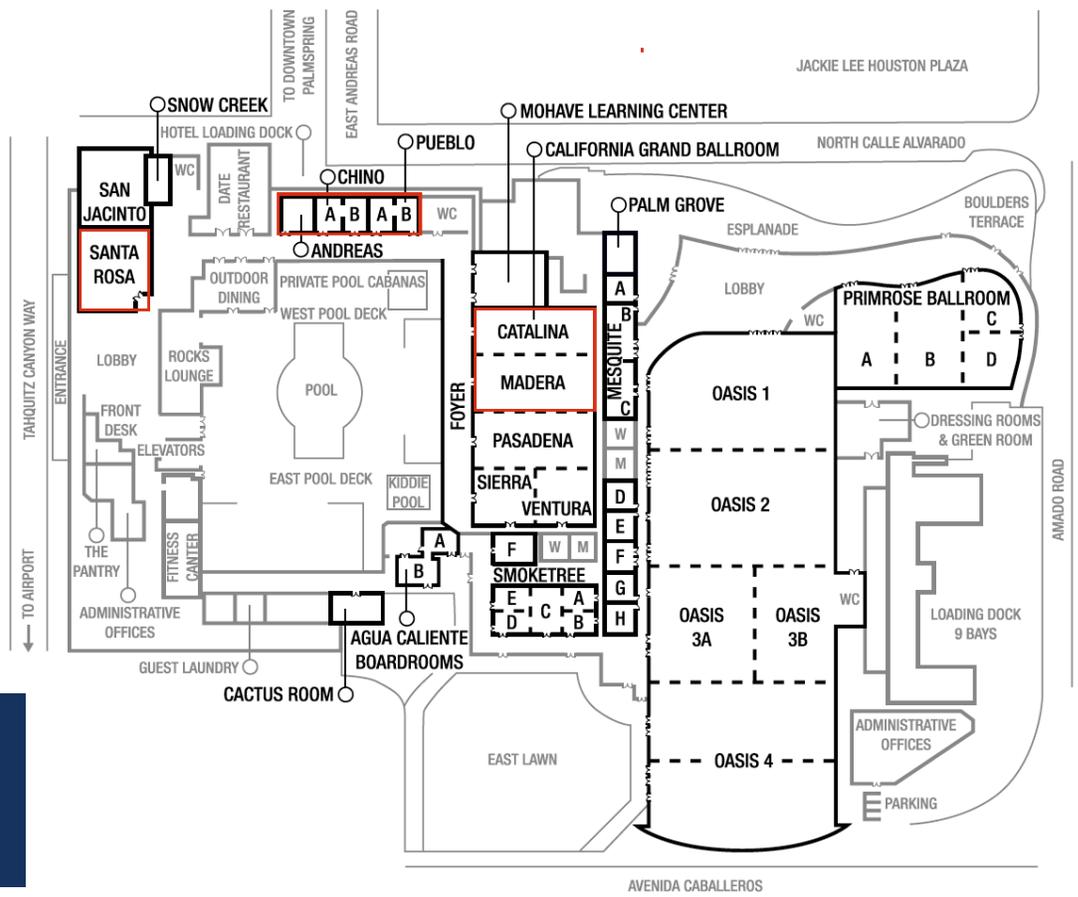
Let's share all the amazing things we do in our rural classrooms, schools, and communities!

Conference Session Planning

Session	Room	Topic
1		
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Posters		

FIRST LEVEL

**THANKS TO
OUR
EXHIBITORS!**





Join Us at the 47th Annual National Conference

***Vote for next year's theme in the ACRES
March Madness Bracket!***



**The Chattanooga Hotel,
Curio Collection by Hilton**

**1201 Broad Street
Chattanooga, TN 37402**

April 8-9, 2027

FMI: acres-sped@mail.wvu.edu

Deadline for proposal submission will be October 2026

Please share this announcement with colleagues and students.

Learn more about ACRES and why you should join us

If you have enjoyed learning from and networking with us at the conference but are not already a member of ACRES, we invite you to join our unique professional organization focused on topics and issues in rural special education and disability services. You can learn more about our organizational structure, conference, publications, and advocacy efforts at <http://acres-sped.org> or <http://acres-sped.org/membership>