2021: A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

Like everyone else, the Rural Education Center (REC) spent the past year maneuvering through obstacles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which triggered the closing of school buildings and the Kansas State University campus. It was beyond the scope of anything we could have expected.

Yet, through it all, the REC pushed forward with a variety of projects.

We succeeded in getting 141 robots delivered to 18 school districts—just in time to help teachers and students alike continue to have a presence in the classroom—at least a virtual one, even during quarantines.

LEAPES, our most recent grant, is a nearly $2.7 million Department of Defense project that kicks off in spring 2022. It encourages STEM careers (especially computer science, aerospace engineering, and artificial intelligence) for 7th through 12th graders across the state of Kansas.

To help manage LEAPES, the REC has hired Kevin Colle as project coordinator. Kevin, a December 2021 graduate of K-State’s College of Education, will work to recruit districts to participate in the project.

Our Grants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Robots/Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRSST</td>
<td>$146,014</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESET</td>
<td>$451,480</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOARING</td>
<td>$339,573</td>
<td>Encouraging geo-science careers through drones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAPES</td>
<td>$2,696,586</td>
<td>Supporting STEM careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$3,633,653</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Director: J. Spencer Clark  
Assistant Director: Lori Goodson  
Program Coordinator: Diane Beets  
Email: ruraled@ksu.edu  
Twitter: @KSURuralED

Our partner schools in USD 113 use a robot to visit a classroom and to view an art display.
Rural PDS Expands

The Rural Education Center’s Rural Professional Development School network got off to a great start with its initial eight school districts, but this year it’s expanding to 15.

Designed to help address rural schools’ most pressing needs, provide a forum to share best practices, explore grant opportunities and highlight accomplishments.

The 15 districts joining our 2021 RPDS network are: Belle Plaine USD 357; Bluestem USD 205; Clay County USD 379; Dighton USD 482; Goodland USD 352; Kiowa County USD 422; Lakin USD 215; Liberal USD 480; Nemaha USD 115; Prairie Hills USD 113; Renwick USD 267; Skyline USD 438; Troy USD 429; Twin Valley USD 240, and Washington USD 108.

These districts are great examples of quality rural districts throughout the state of Kansas. They will be instrumental in helping determine the REC’s path and will be at the forefront for future projects.

ED ASTRA Group Kicks Off

We’re excited about the creation of a student group, ED ASTRA (Teaching Stars), devoted to future rural educators. Led by Program Coordinator Diane Beets, ED ASTRA has an student advisory group passionate about rural education that is developing the organization, which will include recruitment visits to rural districts. If you’d like a visit from an ED ASTRA student to your district, email us!

More of the REC’s 2021 Achievements

During 2021, the REC:

- Hired a full-time program director, Diane Beets.
- Offered its second Rural Education Summit, held virtually in March due to the Pandemic. Plans are under way for the 2022 Summit!
- Held its first ever Virtual STEAM Academy, focusing on bringing hands-on STEAM activities to rural schools.
- Presented at 2 K-State Ed Symposium sessions.
- Published the second issue of Rural Crossroads: CONNECTIONS, the REC newsletter.
- Was assisted by COE Intern Terrence Spurlin.
- Helped send four double robots to schools in Ecuador for an international virtual field experience for our students.