

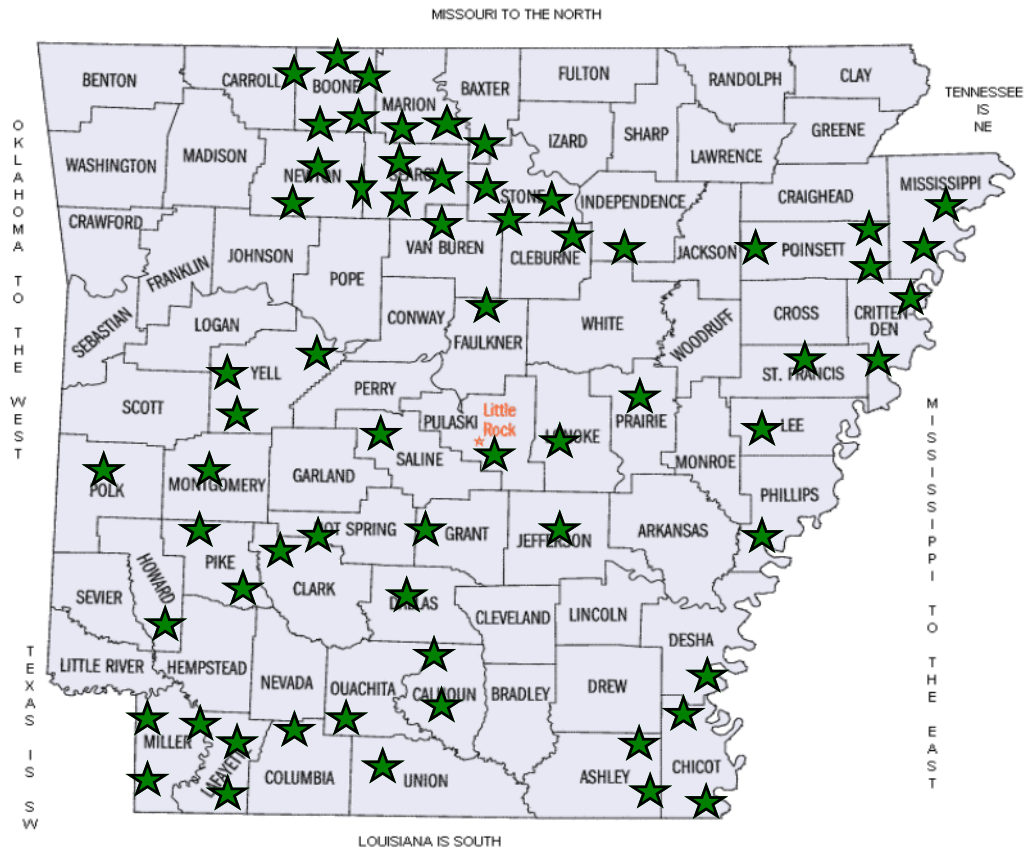
2014 Annual Progress Report



Stepping Up for Public Schools

www.thenewrural.org

Where we are



RCA Chapter

Acorn	Dermott	Genoa Central	Mineral Springs	Shirley
Alpena	Des Arc	Guy-Perkins	Montrose	Smackover
Alzheimer-Dollarway	Diamond City	Hampton	Mt. Judea	Stephens
Arkansas City	Doddridge	Hughes	Murfreesboro	St. Joe
Bearden	Earle	Jasper	Norfork	Timbo
Bismarck	East Poinsett County	Kirby	Oden	Turrell
Bradley	Elaine	Lafayette County	Omaha	Valley Springs
Bruno-Pyatt	Eudora	Lead Hill	Osceola	Waldo
Carthage	Fairfield Bay	Leslie	Paron	Weiner
Carlisle	Flippin	Marianna	Plainview-Rover	Western Yell County
Centerpoint	Fouke	Marked Tree	Poyen	Western Grove
Concord-Ida	Fourche Valley	Marshall	Rivercrest	Wilmot
Delight	Friends of RCA	Midland	Rural Special	Witts Springs

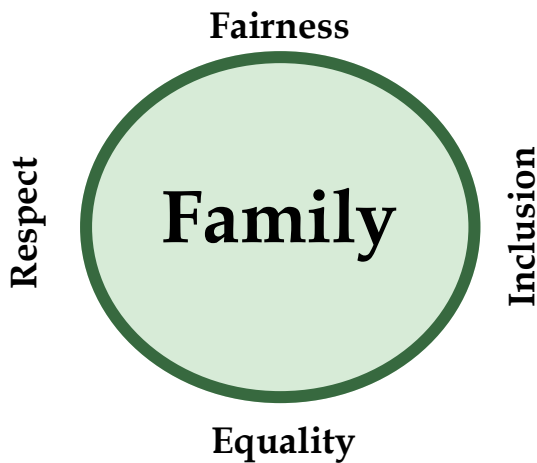
RCA Vision

Rural Community Alliance members have a vision for just and thriving rural communities that offer access to an excellent education, economic opportunity, and rewarding quality of life to all residents.

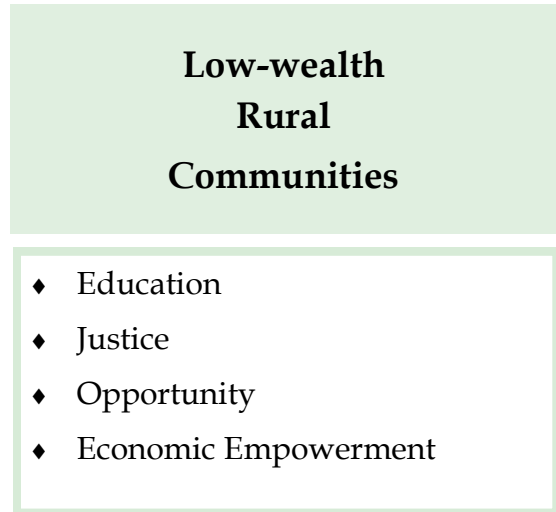
RCA Mission

The mission of Rural Community Alliance is to empower low-income rural communities to effect change by creating opportunities in education, economic development, and youth empowerment to improve quality of life and place.

RCA Moral Center



RCA Core Values



RCA Theory of Change

RCA members believe change happens through informed and organized residents defining the change they want, building collective power, and taking action to improve their lives.

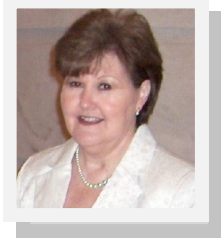
We work to bring about change in communities with a process that starts with assessment and visioning, then strategic planning and implementation--all led and controlled by the grass-roots. RCA staff supports community members with information, resources, and training.

We work through our 65 chapters in low income rural communities throughout the state to share resources, information, and strategies, and we collectively advocate for policies that benefit low-income families, children, and communities. Our members decide on the issues and concerns they will address at the local level, and they determine state-wide and national issues and concerns the organization supports.

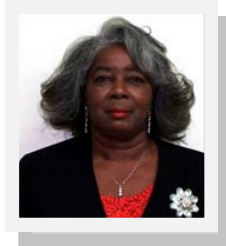
We work with state, regional, and national partners in the areas of education, rural economic development, and social justice to address these issues.

Organizational Structure

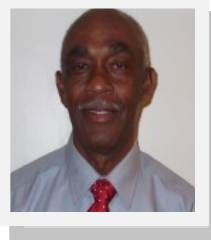
RCA Board



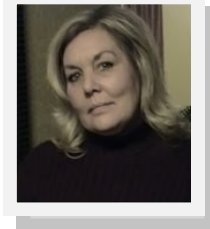
Lavina Grandon, President



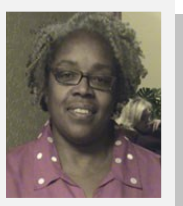
Erma Brown, Vice President



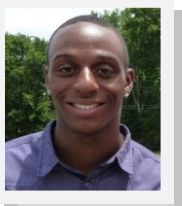
Andrew Taylor, Secretary



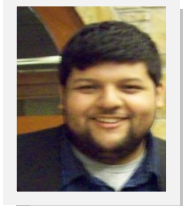
Kerry Cunningham, Treasurer



Dorothy Singleton



Ty Baber



Aris Ortiz, Jr.

Staff

Renee Carr, Executive Director
Candace Williams, Assistant Executive Director
Lavina Grandon, Policy and Education Director
Dorothy Singleton, Lead/Delta Organizer
Matt Grandon, Project Director
Tanya Broadnax, Southeast Organizer
Penny Harris, Southwest Organizer
Alenora Williams, Elaine-Marvell Project Manager



65 Chapter Leaders

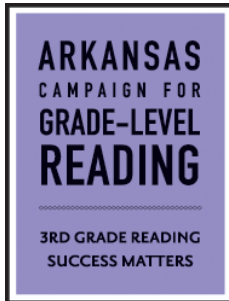
1,852 Members

What Chapters Do

RCA chapters are self-governing local organizations which agree to “act locally and think statewide.” They determine their own structure, procedures, and set of local issues. They are led by a volunteer Chapter Leader, who serves as the contact between members and RCA leadership and staff. RCA staff provides information, resources, and training to local groups. Members are asked to work collectively with other RCA members around the state on issues that will benefit low-wealth rural communities as a whole.

RCA Collaborations

The **Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign** is a coalition of statewide organizations, community leaders, parents, students, educators, policy-makers and others who are committed to public education in Arkansas and dedicated to ensuring every child an equal opportunity to a good education.



The goal of the **Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign** is that all children will read on grade level by the end of 3rd grade. Strategies include kindergarten readiness, good attendance, summer learning, and parent engagement.

The **Formula Fairness Campaign** works to end discrimination against rural and small schools in federal funding of education.



Equal Voice for America's Families seeks to provide a voice to poor and working families on the national, state, and local level.



Southern Echo, Inc. is one of the country's premier organizations for empowering the African-American community through an intergenerational model of community organizing. They have long mentored and assisted in training of RCA community organizers.



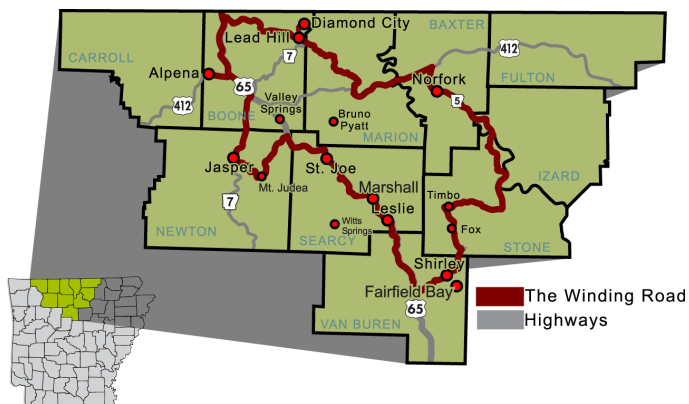
The **Rural Schools Collaborative** is a regional organization comprised of people who recognize the value of local schools and small communities. They believe that innovative instruction, thoughtful collaboration, and targeted philanthropy strengthen the fabric of rural places.

RCA Regional Revitalization Networks

Rural Community Alliance members recognize that in order to save their rural communities and make them more prosperous places to live and work they must pursue new economic development options and think about economic development in new and innovative ways.

In 2008, RCA began helping communities with grass-roots led holistic strategic planning and revitalization projects. Some of those projects have grown into targeted, themed economic development efforts, while others have become part of larger networks.

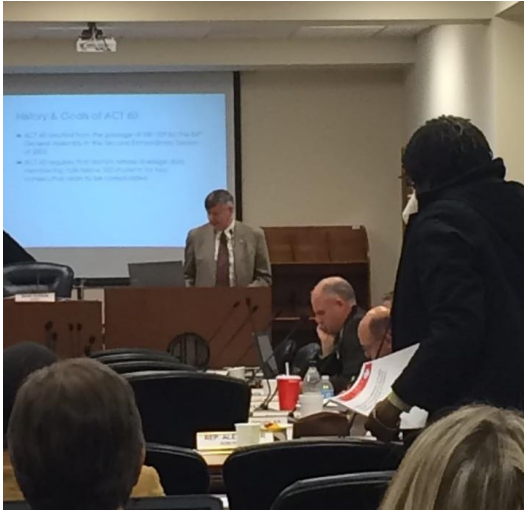
By 2013, 26 RCA chapters were carrying out some level of community revitalization. In North Central Arkansas, 16 communities collaborate in the Ozark Byways revitalization network with a parent website, linked community websites, regional events, and a regional magazine. Steps are being taken to form a Delta Highways revitalization network for small communities in Drew, Desha, Ashley, and Chicot Counties. The networks combine opportunities for training, organizing, and marketing of member communities. More information can be found at www.ozarkbyways.com and www.deltahighways.org.



RCA Policy Development

In addition to working at the local level for better schools and more prosperous communities, RCA members collectively identify policies that will benefit rural Arkansas, and then they advocate for those policies on the state and local level.

In 2014, RCA members and staff participated in interim studies of Act 60, Schools of Agriculture, and Grade Level Reading as well as the Whole Child Whole Community Task Force. The purpose of these studies was to bring recommendations to the Legislature for the 2015 session.



Top left: Rep. Randy Alexander presenting the Act 60 interim study findings on November 12.

Top right: Michelle Cadle and Greta Greeno, faithful advocates who participated in the Act 60 interim study, built political capital to support change, and developed the concept of K-12 schools of agriculture.



Bottom: The OTL crew – Grass roots organizations from around the state come together to advocate for policies that ensure the Opportunity to Learn for every student.

Youth Development

RCA practices an intergenerational model of organizing, believing that youth have an important voice and role to play in strengthening our schools and our communities. RCA youth take part in community revitalization projects and advocacy efforts. They attend conferences and make their voices heard on issues of concern.

Examples of youth involvement include participation in the Jefferson County Parent Summit, a youth internship, youth presentations at the RCA Member Conference, youth involvement in the Elaine Fish Hook Theater Project, and community service by youth in Paron, Dermott, Doddridge, and other chapters around the state.

Summer Conference 2014, Leslie AR

Each year RCA members gather from around the state to celebrate successes, share ideas, and plan for future work. In 2014 the annual member conference was held in Leslie, in North Central Arkansas. Participants heard about the Farm to School program in Plainview, youth work in Paron, and community organizing and community revitalization projects around the state. We decided issues for the upcoming legislative session and kicked off the Step Up for Public Schools campaign. The conference was capped off with an outstanding performance by the Fish Hook Theatre project of the Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers. We sampled local hospitality and with a tour of Leslie's revitalization project saw first-hand what a community that pulls together can accomplish.



Celebrating the Work in Our Communities



Step Up for Public Schools

From our youngest to our oldest, in 2014 RCA members reaffirmed our support for public education and our public schools. First, we adopted a policy agenda that included support for strengthening many aspects that create a strong, successful public school system that is accessible to all and included:

- Adequate funding for traditional public schools
- Limiting expansion of charter schools and publicly funded vouchers for private schools
- Repealing Act 60, which has resulted in the closure of over 100 rural campuses
- Engaging parents in the education process
- Better access to Broadband for rural schools
- Adequate compensation, better health insurance, and more relevant staff development for teachers
- More funding for school facilities
- Reform of career and technical education
- Funding for after-school and summer programs





Waldo



Carlisle



Doddridge



Rural Special



Dermott



Mt. Judea



Western Grove

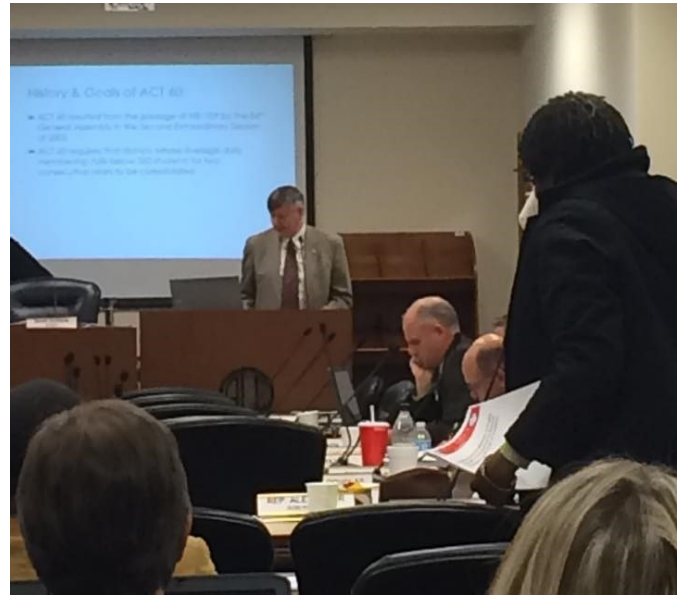


Wilmot

2014 Events



Eudora Reads! On March 3 kids and adults in Eudora were excited to kick off their community-wide campaign to increase reading proficiency by 3rd grade as part of the Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign with tutoring, books in the home, Parent University, reading events at the local library, summer learning, and more.



Act 60 Interim Study: On November 17, Rep. Randy Alexander presented the results of the two-year study of the effects of Act 60 on rural schools. RCA staff and members participated in this study. The study and grass roots lobbying by rural advocates, along with the Governor's support, led to a law to grant a waiver from consolidation for schools with under 350 enrollment if they met other criteria.



Ozark Byways Buypdays: On September 27 the third annual Buypdays event for the Ozark Byways regional revitalization project brought hundreds of visitors into the region's 16 small rural communities, resulting in sales of about \$20,000.



40 Leaders: On December 4 RCA President Lavina Grandon (pictured 2nd from left with Executive Director Renee Carr, Lead Organizer Dorothy Singleton, and Assistant Executive Director Candace Williams) was named by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation as one of 40 non-profit leaders who are making a difference in Arkansas.



Opportunity to Learn Summit: (Left) RCA partners with a number of organizations on the Arkansas Opportunity to Learn Campaign. At the October 3-4 Opportunity to Learn Summit, more than 200 people from around the state came together to discuss how we can be sure that every child has access to an excellent education. Key factors to ensure the opportunity to learn include adequate pre-K funding and access, after-school and summer programs, adequate funding, support for highly qualified teachers for all children, access to college for all high school graduates, and increased, meaningful parent and community engagement.



Searcy County Chamber of Commerce: In February Lavina Grandon spoke at the Chamber's annual banquet about economic development in small rural places.



Fish Hook Theater: In March Elaine's Fish Hook Theatre traveled to Brinkley for a special performance. This community theater group was started by Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers to help with economic development of their small rural town through writing and performing folk life plays.



Pies for Literacy: In April the Valley Springs RCA chapter held a pie baking contest and pie sale to raise money for local literacy projects.



Rural Schools Film Project: With help from the Rural Schools Collaborative, in October RCA produced three videos to highlight the value of rural schools.



2nd Annual Jefferson County Parent Engagement Summit, organized by lead organizer Dorothy Singleton in September.



Asset Development Workshop: Philanthropist and rural advocate Gary Funk emphasized the value of telling your story to attract supporters for your work at a workshop for Ozark Byways leaders and RCA board members in September.

RCA Chapters

Rural Community Alliance has 1,852 members in 65 chapters throughout the state of Arkansas. Chapters are self-governing entities which are encouraged to “act locally but think state-wide.” Thus, each chapter is expected to carry out local advocacy and capacity building efforts in their school and community while participating in state, regional, and national activities that will benefit rural communities, students, and schools. Each chapter is led by a volunteer chapter leader, who is also part of the Rural Community Alliance Policy Council. Following is a list of Rural Community Alliance chapters and some of their activities in 2013.

Acorn: Chapter since 2006, 9 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, established school-based health clinic

Alpena: Chapter since 2005, 44 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, volunteered with historic restoration, volunteered with community cleanup; sponsored Egg Hunt, Christmas Parade, Run for the Gravy, and Smokin’ the Pass BBQ contest, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, www.alpenapass.org

Alzheimer-Dollarway: Chapter since 2006, 27 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, produced Jefferson County Parent Summit, attended state OTL Summit, added new members, participated in parent engagement group, participated in GLR interim study and Act 60 interim study

Arkansas City: Chapter since 2012, 29 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at community events, member of Delta Highways revitalization network, community food pantry, community website arkansascityusa.com, attended city council meetings, submitted articles to newspaper, added new members

Bearden: Chapter since 2009, 22 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings

Bismarck: Chapter since 2008, 17 members, volunteered at school, participated in merchants group, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, historic preservation activity, community festival, contacted legislators, community food pantry

Bradley: Chapter since 2005, 81 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, attended legislative training, participated in school board election, attended school board meetings, community website, community Facebook page, submitted articles for newspaper, added new members, participated in Step Up for Public Schools (**right, Bradley Conway Days Festival**)



Bruno-Pyatt: Chapter since 2005, 39 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community event, attended school board meetings, produced heritage festival, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, contacted legislators, produced summer learning camp, added new members, participated in Step Up for Public Schools

Carthage: Chapter since 2006, 5 members, volunteered at community events, attended City Council meetings, participated in economic development

Carlisle: Chapter since 2005, 16 members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, participated in Step Up for Public Schools

Centerpoint: Chapter since 2006, 7 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

Concord-Ida: Chapter since 2012, 8 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meeting, participated in school board election, participated in education event, volunteered at community event, contacted legislators

Delight: Chapter since 2005, 95 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, produced 5th annual music festival, served on revitalization focus groups, annual Christmas parade, attended school board meetings, submitted newspaper articles, city beautification, attended RCA conference, repurposed former school building for community purposes, added new members, contacted legislators

Dermott: Chapter since 2008, 90 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, attended state OTL Summit, parent engagement group, volunteered at school, organized community events, produced Crawfish Festival, city beautification, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, back to school event, health screenings, submitted newspaper articles, community yard sale, contacted legislators, joined Delta Highways network, held teacher appreciation event, website www.dermott.org, community Facebook page, participated in Step Up for Public Schools (right, Dermott Crawfish Festival)



Des Arc: Chapter since 2005, 20 members, added new members, contacted legislators, attended school board meetings, volunteered at community events

Diamond City: Chapter since 2006, 10 members, attended City Council meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, produced festivals, contacted legislators, received grants, participated in community foundation and Lakeshore Districts economic development network, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, held veterans celebrations, participated in Act 60 video project, www.diamondcityar.org

Doddridge: Chapter since 2012, 81 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, volunteered at community event, attended school board meetings, community beautification, attended OTL Summit, contacted legislators, developed museum and historic site, held back-to-school event, community Facebook page

Earle: Chapter since 2009, 7 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in community event, contacted legislators, held education event

East Poinsett County: Chapter since 2009, 16 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

Elaine: Chapter since 2006, 49 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, produced arts festival and community theater performance, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, participated in Step-Up for Public Schools, participated in Good to Great pre-K project, contacted legislators, wrote grants, participated in GLR interim study, community website www.elainear.org, community Facebook page, attended city council meetings, submitted articles for newspaper, participated in Delta Highways revitalization network



Eudora: Chapter since 2005, 72 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, city beautification, parent engagement group, community literacy project, participated in AR-GLR webinars, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, held summer festival, contacted legislators, held back-to-school event, summer feeding/learning program, after-school tutoring (right, Eudora Reads! event)

Fairfield Bay: New chapter, 29 members, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network, produced community events, community website visitfairfieldbay.com, attended city council meetings (right, Bloomin in the Bay, one of Fairfield Bay's many fun festivals)



Flippin: Chapter since 2011, 4 members, attended school board meetings, contacted legislators, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, participated in Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign, participated in GLR Attendance Works project

Fouke: Chapter since 2012, 15 members, added new members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in education event, community website, community Facebook page, attended city council meetings, community festival, contacted legislators

Fourche Valley: Chapter since 2009, 53 members, organized alumni reunion, volunteered at community events, raised money for community projects, attended school board meetings, worked for cell and Internet access, contacted legislators, community Facebook page

Friends of RCA: Chapter since 2005, 70 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, provided technical assistance, contacted legislators

Genoa Central: Chapter since 2006, 15 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in school board election, participated in education event

Guy-Perkins: Chapter since 2009, 7 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

Hampton: Chapter since 2005, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, Men of Knowledge YEN, attended legislative committee hearings, parent engagement project

Hughes: New chapter, 33 members, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, attended school board meetings, held education event, volunteered at school, participated in Step Up for Public Schools (**right, young and old are stepping up in the Hughes community to try to save their school**)

Jasper: Emerging chapter, 2 members, participated in Ozark Byways regional network and events, community website www.theozarkmountains.com, held community festivals and events

Kirby: New chapter, 33 members, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in education event, attended RCA Summer Conference, added new members, volunteered at community event, participated in community revitalization, community Facebook page, community festival, provided interviews for Act 60 videos, submitted op-ed to Equal Voice magazine, worked to increase school enrollment (**right, Kirby residents talk about saving their school from Act 60 consolidation**)

Lafayette County: Chapter since 2012, 5 members, volunteered at community events, volunteered at school, participated in school board election, participated in education event, contacted legislators

Lead Hill: Chapter since 2006, 29 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, attended city council meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, attended RCA summer conference, participated in Lakeshore Districts economic development campaign, volunteered at community events, Lead Hill 4th of July Celebration and Parade, held veterans' event, participated in Ozark Byways regional planning and events, Facebook page, participated in Act 60 video project, 200th year celebration, www.leadhill.org

Leslie: Chapter since 2006, 55 members, added new members, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, attended school board meetings, participated in revitalization project, added new businesses, participated in Searcy County Chamber of Commerce, volunteered at community events, attended RCA conference, regular music performances at OHAC, Farmers Market, Fishing Derby, Homecoming, West Fest, Sugarplum Festival, city-wide cleanup, attended city council meetings, Merchants Association, on arts tour, Facebook page, city-wide rummage sale, lawn mower races, annual Mountain Man Rendezvous, Ancestor Fair, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, www.lesliearkansas.org

Marianna: Chapter since 2005, 43 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, attended RCA conference, attended OTL Summit

Marshall: Chapter since 2013, 33 members, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, participated in Searcy County Chamber of Commerce, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, held community events, volunteered at school, Facebook page, www.marshallar.org

Marked Tree: Chapter since 2009, 4 members, volunteered at school

Midland: Emerging chapter, 2 members

Montrose: Chapter since 2013, 3 members, attended city council meetings, community festival, contacted legislators, historic preservation

Mineral Springs: Chapter since 2009, 5 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in school board election

Mt. Judea: Chapter since 2011, 41 members, added new members, attended RCA conference, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, summer learning camp, Mt. Judea Area Alliance, Christmas parade, attended OTL Summit, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, applied for grant, produced heritage festival, www.mtjudea.org, participated in Step Up for Public Schools (**right, Anita Hudson demonstrates churning butter at the first annual Mt. Judea Heritage Day Celebration, produced by the Mt. Judea Area Alliance in May**)

Murfreesboro: Emerging chapter, 3 members



Norfolk: Chapter since 2011, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, Pioneer Days festival, participated in Ozark Byways planning and events, linked to Ozark Byways website, www.cityofnorfolk.org (right, Civil War reenactment on the site of Norfolk's historic Wolf House, oldest public structure in Arkansas)



Oden: Chapter since 2005, 24 members, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, participated in education event, historic preservation, Facebook page, community beautification, community festival, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper

Omaha: Chapter since 2009, 5 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school

Osceola: Chapter since 2009, 9 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

Paron: Chapter since 2006, 15 members, attended school board meetings, participated in school election, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, Hosted Paron Pride day, Hosted Mayfest, maintained community center, volunteered at community events, attended RCA Conference, Fall Fest, youth engagement, Facebook page,



Plainview-Rover: Chapter since 2005, 58 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, attended rural education conference, hosted fall festival, participated in merchants group, attended city council meetings, attended RCA conference, Farm to School grant and project (right, Chuck McCool talks about his Farm to School program in Yell County)

Poyen: Chapter since 2005, 13 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators

Rivercrest: Chapter since 2009, 8 members, volunteered at school, attended RCA Conference

Rural Special: Chapter since 2005, 110 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, participated in school election, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, contacted legislators, submitted newspaper articles, gave testimony before legislative committee, school foundation, Ozark Byways revitalization project, YouTube.com/FoxArkansas, volunteered at community events, Fox Fun Fest, Veterans Day event, attended RCA conference, attended OTL Summit, attended Arkansas Grade-Level Reading events, on AR-GLR steering committee, linked to Ozark Byways website, volunteered at community event, historic preservation, community Facebook page, community beautification, submitted articles for newspaper

Shirley: Chapter since 2013, 22 members, held annual Shirley Homecoming, attended city council meetings, participated in Ozark Byways regional network, produced Halloween and Christmas events with gifts and treats for children, staffed Shirley Museum, www.shirleyarkansas.org, volunteered at school, attended school board meetings, participated in school board election, participated in education event, historic preservation, community beautification, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network (right, mural project is part of Shirley's historic restoration and preservation)



Smackover: Chapter since 2007, 13 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events

Stephens: Chapter since 2009, 6 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, participated in school board election, participated in education event, historic preservation, community revitalization, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, attended RCA summer conference

St. Joe: Chapter since 2009, 41 members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, contacted legislators, volunteered at community events, restoring historic railroad depot, Searcy County Rural Help Center, attended city council meetings, city clean-up, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, held events to raise money for community projects, added new members, www.stjoearkansas.org

Timbo: Chapter since 2007, 8 members, volunteered at school, participated in education event, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspaper, participated in Ozark Byways regional revitalization network, hosted alumni reunion, volunteered at community event

Turrell: Chapter since 2006, 17 members

Valley Springs: Chapter since 2005, 130 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, Valley Springs School and Community Foundation, participated in Ozark Byways regional network planning and events, attended RCA conference, participated in AR-GLR interim study, maintained children's book exchange, provide summer reading for kindergarten students, bought bicycles for attendance incentive at school, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, www.valleyspringsar.org

Waldo: Chapter since 2012, 19 members, added new members, attended city council meetings, volunteered at community events, attended school board meetings, participated in school election, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, participated in education event, parent engagement project, historic preservation, community revitalization, contacted legislators, submitted articles for newspapers, contacted legislators

Weiner: Chapter since 2010, 36 members, added new members, attended school board meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, worked to keep school campuses open, maintained Friends of Weiner School District Facebook page, contacted legislators, developed legislation to suspend Act 60 consolidations, participated in Act 60 interim study, initiated interim study for schools of agriculture, developed School of Innovation, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, attended RCA summer conference (**right, advocates extraordinaire, Greta Greeno and Michelle Cadle, who have worked hard to make it possible for small rural schools to continue to exist and to make their rural school a model for innovation**)

Western Yell County: Chapter since 2012, 42 members, attended city council meetings, attended school board meetings, attended Chamber of Commerce meetings, volunteered at school, volunteered at community events, contacted legislators, attended Champions of Rural Arkansas event, community revitalization

Western Grove: New chapter, 7 members, participated in Step Up for Public Schools

Wilmot: New chapter, 7 members, attended OTL Summit, participated in Step Up for Public Schools, attended school board meetings, worked to keep school open, volunteered at community event, attended city council meetings, contacted legislators, participated in regional revitalization network

Witts Springs: New chapter, 30 members, volunteered at community events, community festival, community Facebook page, participated in Ozark Byways revitalization network (**right, the Witts Springs Garden Club, one of many civic organizations that keep people connected in this isolated community on the edge of the Ozark National Forest**)



RCA Accomplishments

Below is a partial list of accomplishments of RCA members and their allies since the organization was formed in 2003.

1. In consolidation controversy, reduced minimum enrollment number from 1,500 to 350 to save 175 rural school districts.
2. Education Renewal Zones to create public school/university partnerships to improve academic achievement.
3. Poverty and English Language Learner funding.
4. Funding for preschool.
5. Prevented passage of county-wide schools in 2003, 2004, and 2005.
6. Distance learning capability for every school district.
7. Helped get and preserve funding for isolated and super-isolated schools.
8. Defeated a bill that gave the State Board power to hire and fire school district superintendents.
9. Successfully promoted a law to prevent a school's being on fiscal distress due to capital im-

10. Successfully promoted a law to allow freedom of choice to students whose school had been consolidated.
11. Chapters at Lead Hill, Bismark, Midland, and Western Yell County helped get their schools off fiscal distress.
12. Youth enterprise training for 30 youths, grants for 7.
13. Helped local chapters run members for school board, pass millage increases, improve school climate, start parent involvement projects, establish tutoring programs, recruit highly qualified leadership for schools.
14. Disincentived closing isolated campuses by blocking a bill to allow isolated funding to follow the student even if a campus is closed.
15. Taught financial literacy to over 2,000 rural youth and adults.
16. Participating in Opportunity to Learn Campaign
17. Participating in Formula Fairness Campaign
18. Participating in Arkansas Grade-Level Reading Campaign
19. Participating in Equal Voice for America's Families Campaign
20. Participating in Moving the Needle on Poverty Campaign
21. Passed a law to return unused buildings in consolidated school districts to the community.
22. Blocked a bill to allow the State Department of Education to close an isolated school without a vote by the local school board.
23. Held economic development town halls with Lt. Gov. Mark Darr at Leslie and Weiner.
24. Youth Empowerment Network in 15 rural communities.
25. Led a state-wide effort to save rural post offices. Established a website to educate and inform public. Secured support in the form of bills filed in Congress from Congressman Rick Crawford and Senator John Boozman.
26. Helped Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers form community development corporation and community theater.
27. Helped Valley Springs and Lead Hill/Diamond City form school and community foundations. Trained 25 community leaders in forming local foundations and endowments.
28. Leadership training for over 1,000 people. Board training and grant writing training for over 100 people.
29. Successfully promoted law extending timeline for schools on fiscal, academic, or facilities distress.
30. Chapter at Fox established school foundation, built building, and established ABC preschool.
31. Successfully promoted law for joint use of facilities by school and communities.
32. Laws strengthening parent engagement.
33. Held Jefferson County Parent Engagement Summit.
34. Developed models for parent engagement in low-income rural communities.
35. Blocked unaccountable Charter School Commission.
36. Blocked bill to divert state funds from education and other services to state highway department.
37. Revitalization projects in 26 chapters, two regional revitalization networks.
38. Set up Facebook page to call attention to Act 60 consolidations: **[Facebook.com/arkansasruralschools](https://www.facebook.com/arkansasruralschools)**.
39. Produced video series about benefits of rural schools.
40. Initiated interim study of effects of Act 60
41. Interim study for schools of agriculture
42. Step Up for Public Schools walks in 20 communities
43. Social media platform: 24 websites, 3 Facebook pages, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram
44. Participated in ForwARd process for preK-16 strategic plan for education.
45. 1,852 members in 65 chapters.

RCA History

Save Our Schools.

Rural Community Alliance began in 2003 as a grass-roots movement called Save Our Schools. SOS was formed by rural educators, students, and community members to resist a massive school consolidation plan that would have eliminated every Arkansas school district with fewer than 1,500 students. The statewide movement held local, regional, and state-wide rallies and led a grass-roots campaign to stop school consolidation and refocus attention on quality of education and an equitable school funding formula.



Bruno-Pyatt residents voicing their concerns at the Capitol in March 2003



RCA President Lavina Grandon speaking at a Save Our Schools rally in February 2003

Through the efforts of Save Our Schools and coalition partners, the proposed minimum enrollment number was reduced to 350, saving about 175 small rural schools. The Legislature mandated Education Renewal Zones to provide partnerships between rural schools and university education departments to improve academic outcomes. More money for high poverty and special needs money was added to the school funding formula. The state approved incentives for teachers to be employed in hard-to-staff areas. Access to preschool was greatly expanded. Distance learning technology was funded to give every school access to affordable high quality curriculum. County-wide schools bills were defeated in three successive sessions of the Legislature.

Advocates for Community and Rural

Education (ACRE).

Following the 2003 regular and special sessions of the Arkansas Legislature (which lasted into April of 2004), rural education advocates realized that a permanent advocacy organization was needed to stand up for rural schools and students. With the help of mentors at the Rural School and Community Trust, grass-roots leaders chose a board and a name, wrote by-laws, incorporated as a nonprofit organization, and applied



for charitable 501c3 status. With a board, one part-time organizer, and some dedicated volunteers, Advocates for Community and Rural Education began organizing chapters throughout the state. Leaders were greatly assisted during this period by training and mentoring from Southern Echo of Jackson, Mississippi, and continued involvement of the Rural School and Community Trust.

Left: Since 2006 members have gathered each summer to share their stories, participate in training, and make decisions that guide the organization.

During the period from 2005 to 2009, the organization helped numerous communities fight off attempts to close their schools after they were “administratively consolidated” or annexed following the enactment of a minimum enrollment number of 350 students. It maintained a website that provided information on rural education issues and policy efforts. It published a quarterly newsletter, regular e-mail updates, and educational materials to help members understand and advocate for their issues.

Legislatively, members successfully advocated for funding for isolated and super-isolated schools and districts; school choice for students whose school was closed due to consolidation; and passage of a bill that provided for earlier notification of districts in danger of being on fiscal distress and prevented a district’s being placed on fiscal distress due to capital improvements. Their actions helped defeat a bill that would have given the State Board of Education the power to hire and fire school district superintendents. Chapters of Advocates for Community and Rural Education participated in a number of local efforts, including helping resolve a teachers strike, running candidates for school board, recruiting quality staff for their schools, running successful millage campaigns, helping their districts improve their financial situation, improving school climate, producing brochures to attract more students, initiating tutoring programs, and holding school boards accountable. From 2006 to 2009, Advocates for Community and Rural Education’s summer conference trained more than 400 participants in education advocacy and community development.



Bismarck supporters ran a successful campaign to pass a millage to get their school off of fiscal and facilities distress.

Rural Community Alliance. As more rural school districts began to be in danger of not maintaining the minimum enrollment, it gradually became clear to the ACRE board and staff that rural schools must be supported by thriving rural communities, and the loss of people and jobs must somehow be reversed to create a truly prosperous rural Arkansas. In 2008, the organization launched its Rural Community Revitalization Initiative to create a ground-up, grass-roots led revitalization process in which community members vision and plan to build on their past and their present to create a better future. In the summer of 2009, the board proposed to ACRE membership that the organization change its name to Rural Community Alliance in recognition of the growing importance of its community-based work and its overarching significance for rural families, children, and schools. A membership campaign in late 2009 increased the membership base of Rural Community Alliance to over 1,000 members in more than 45 communities.



Delight Natural Resources focus group

As RCA expanded we remained committed to our original purpose of empowering rural community members by “helping rural schools and communities survive and thrive.” We joined the Equal Voice Campaign for America’s Families, the Formula Fairness Campaign to equalize funding for Title I students, the Opportunity to Learn Campaign, and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading to advocate for sufficient and equitable funding for education. We began forming revitalization networks to magnify the voice and influence of small rural communities. We continued to advocate for policy issues that create opportunities for rural schools and people. Entering its 12th year, RCA membership had grown to over 1,800 members in 65 chapters throughout the state.

2014 Champions of Rural Arkansas



Every other year RCA honors men and women who have made a significant difference in quality of life and place for rural Arkansas. In 2014 the Champions were (left to right) Michelle Cadle, Weiner; Greta Greeno, Weiner; Bill Abernathy, Mena; Kelley Linck, Flippin; John Catlett, Plainview; Butch Calhoun, Des Arc; Stephanie Flowers, Pine Bluff; Heather Laster, Belleville; and (not pictured) Alenora Williams, Elaine.

Michelle Cadle and Greta Greeno were honored for their advocacy to keep open their local school, spearheading the effort to turn it into a School of Innovation. They were also integral members of the Act 60 Interim Study and instigated a study to develop K-12 Schools of Agriculture.

Former Representative Bill Abernathy is a longtime rural educator and championed rural schools both in the legislature and later as Executive Director of the Arkansas Rural Education Association.

Representative Kelley Linck has worked for rural economic development during his term at the legislature and sponsored an interim study and a bill that led to the repurposing of abandoned school buildings for community use.

Representative John Catlett was a key sponsor of a bill to extend the amount of time a school has on academic, fiscal, or facilities distress before the state can effect a take-over as well as supported rural schools and rural economic development.

Butch Calhoun, director of the Department of Rural Services has given much time and effort to rural community revitalization, and has been a powerful voice for rural Arkansas.

Senator Stephanie Flowers has worked tirelessly for rural communities and produced important legislation promoting parent and community engagement in schools.

Heather Laster organized her community to get their school, Western Yell County, off the fiscal distress list, and then she lobbied for legislation extending timelines for schools in similar situations.

Alenora Williams has been a longtime chapter leader at Elaine, along with her husband, Clyde. In 2012 she founded Elaine Community Opportunity Seekers and the Elaine Fish Hook Community Theatre to create more economic opportunity in the small Delta town of Elaine.

Ways to Save Your Small School from Consolidation

Act 60 of 2003 required all schools with fewer than 350 students in grades K-12 to consolidate. Communities threatened with an Act 60 consolidation need to execute both a short-term and a long-term strategy in order to save their school.

Short-term. It is imperative that the enrollment not fall below 350 for two consecutive years. Some steps that have been taken to raise enrollment in districts under threat of consolidation include the following:

- Enlist the participation of the entire community in supporting the school. Get a committee of committed patrons led by a dynamic leader who is dedicated to keeping the school.
- Form a true partnership between school and community.
- Obtain a list of home school and school choice students and enticing them back to the school.
- Convene a meeting of students and parents to listen to ways school climate could be improved in order to keep students in the school. Respond with student-friendly policies, like limited cell phone use, student input on dress code, etc.
- Make up a list of “brag” items the community can help with: Billboards, “We Support ___School” yard signs, Public Service Announcements, etc.
- Host exchange students.
- Become a School of Innovation (you can get an exemption from the 350 limit for this).
- Become a School of Agriculture (also eligible for an exemption from the 350 limit).
- Lead Hill went to electronic textbooks and provides each student with an i-Pad.
- Free lunch and breakfast for every student.
- Offer concurrent courses with the nearest community college.
- Form a chapter of Rural Community Alliance to get informed and get connected.
- Make sure your school is eligible for waivers by being academically and fiscally sound.

Long-term. Schools are losing enrollment in part because rural towns are losing population. Each rural community needs a long-term strategy to arrest out-migration of both jobs and people.

We're creating a movement to renew rural Arkansas.

Get connected. Get involved.

Join us!

Download a membership form at www.thenewrural.org

Rural People Working Together

Education
Youth Development
Community Revitalization
Policy Development

RURAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

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