

CIRCLE

Center for Innovative Rural Collaboration for Leadership in Education

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ANNUAL 2023-24 REPORT



CIRCLE Project Center report 2023-24

In June 2023, CIRCLE was pleased to welcome Erin Gill, a promising doctoral candidate from the University of Wisconsin Madison, join our team as our first CIRCLE Fellow. She collaborated with several CIRCLE Rural Research Labs throughout the summer and is continuing as a volunteer member of the Rural Queer Youth (RQY) research team. One University of Denver doctoral student, two University of Denver

recent doctoral graduates, one recent doctoral graduate and a doctoral candidate from Virginia Tech join Erin in this mixed-method study, which examines the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of principals whose rural schools welcome and support students who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community.



CIRCLE is grateful be the first UCEA rural Program Center

In August, Dr. Kristina Hesbol, Associate Professor from the University of Denver, CIRCLE's Founding Director was invited once again to participate in the second annual Centergies conference at Virginia Tech, bringing together leaders from these rural centers:

- Rural Education Institute at East Carolina University
- Purdue Center for Rural Research, Education, and Outreach
- National Center for Rural Education Research Networks at Harvard University
- Center for Research on Rural Education at Montana State University
- Maine Rural Vitality Lab
- Center for Rural Education at Virginia Tech



Dr. Kristina Hesbol
Associate Professor from
the University of Denver
CIRCLE Founding Director

Dr. Hesbol returns to present at University of Glasgow

Dr. Hesbol returned to Glasgow, Scotland in late October 2023, where she was invited to present, From Accountability to Responsibility: Improving Learning Leadership from the Ground Up to Kevin Lowden and faculty of the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change at the University of Glasgow, bridging the gap between innovative rural school leadership and collaborative networks that support organizational improvement in education.

Following the presentation, audience participants shared questions and inquired about future collaboration. She visited more rural Scottish schools, adding to those she visited the previous year, where she interviewed and was inspired by several nominated Bright Spot leaders. There are at least

three more potential leaders whose interview data will contribute to a series of case studies in a book she is writing that will be published by Routledge, tentatively titled, *Unanticipated Lessons from Rural Bright Spots*.

Professional Research Presentations

CIRCLE was invited to serve on a panel at the 2023 National Rural Education Association in Chattanooga, convened by Harvard's National Center for Rural Education Networks (NCRERN). Associate Professor Kent Seidel, the Founding Director of the Center for Practice Engaged Education Research (C-PEER) and CIRCLE Research Director, shared our collaborative insights through an invited panel presentation. We were delighted to have two papers and a Critical Conversation accepted for presentation at UCEA 2023 in Minneapolis. Dr. Hesbol shared her research findings on the San Luis Valley and South Central Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) at the 83rd Annual Convention of the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB). The event took place from December 7 to 9, 2023, at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs.

We were pleased to have two papers accepted for AERA 2024 that we presented in Philadelphia. Dr. Hesbol shared her research findings on the San Luis Valley and South Central Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) at the 83rd Annual Convention of the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB). The event took place in December 2023, at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. CIRCLE had a paper accepted at the British Educational Research Association annual meeting on 8 September 2024, a collaboration between rural researchers in England, Scotland, and the US. Drs. Seidel and Hesbol presented at the National Forum to Advance Rural Education at the National Rural Education Association in Savannah and are presenting at the 2024 UCEA Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, California on November 20–21.

Student-Centered Accountability Project (S-CAP)

We are in discussions with rural schools in several US states, in Scotland, and in Wales to beta test an open source suite of co-constructed tools ("evidence with engagement"), collaboratively developed and implemented by the Student-Centered



Dr. Kent Seidel
Associate Professor from
the University of Colorado Denver
CIRCLE Research Director

Dr. Julie Oxenford-O'Brian
the Co-Director of S-CAP and
Human Development at the
University of Colorado Denver



Accountability Project (S-CAP), CIRCLE Research Director Kent Seidel, and S-CAP Co-Director Julie O'Brian of the University of Colorado Denver. These instruments, based on the original Concerns Based Accountability Measure (CBAM) (Hall & Hord, 1974), are nuanced to reflect place-based values of each school or district, currently used in more than 25 Colorado school districts. The suite includes student, teacher, administrator, and family surveys. They have been tested for reliability and found to be strong scales that provide valuable information to the school/district. Cross-site infrastructures have been developed where researchers can access deidentified evidence (dashboards), which CIRCLE can help build for small rural schools.

Central to the S-CAP process are cross-district school visits that include a team of teachers, leaders, community members, several students and a Board member. This is a different way of partnering research; knowing first-hand that for small rural schools, in particular, external "data" doesn't improve teacher or leader practice. It recalibrates the importance of local evidence, particularly in light of the wisdom that in rural contexts, place matters. The S-CAP process "sweet spot" is the collaborative generation of evidence, designed to help in continuous improvement.

Advisory Board Appointments

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Hesbol has been named to Advisory Board of the Colorado Center for Rural Education at the University of Northern Colorado. CIRCLE made two presentations in May 16 (online) and May 23 (in person) as part of this new role. She serves as a member of the Governing Board of REL Central Mathematica, one of the seven IES regional educational labs, and as a member of the Editorial Board of The Rural Educator.

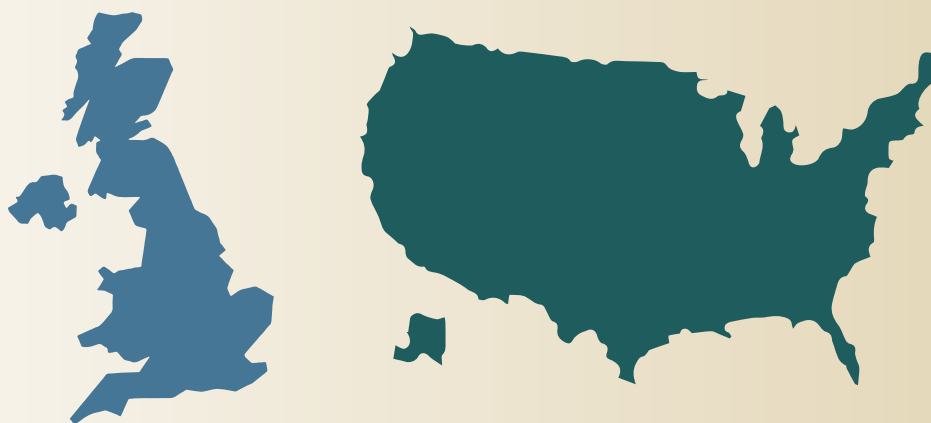




Dr. Fayaz Amiri is a 2024 PhD graduate of the University of Denver and a former CIRCLE graduate assistant. He collected rural research data from 2017-2024. He is a Fulbright Scholar from Lehigh University and works as a Senior Data Analyst for Denver Public Schools.



Rural Educators Across Borders (REAB) Leadership Project



Partnership, Rural Educators Across Borders (REAB), between **rural American principals** and **rural head teachers from either Wales or Northern Ireland**.

In May 2024, we completed a partnership, the Rural Educators across Borders (REAB)/The Reciprocity Leadership Project. CIRCLE rural researchers collaborated with a colleague from the Welsh Government to identify 10 rural head teachers from Wales and Northern Ireland and 10 rural principals from the US. Each had one teacher from their school participating in a joint sustainability project.

The leaders met every other month to collaborate with their partners “across the pond” in a networked improvement community, focused on rural resilience. The initial impetus for the project was only between teachers and their students, and we decided that since leadership matters, we’d like to engage the school leaders. Each of their schools had an intermediate-level teacher who also participated and was partnered in pairs of classrooms. Each of these classroom partners focused on sustainability, as viewed from their cultural and regional perspectives. Dr. Kent Seidel, Associate Professor at the University of Colorado Denver, and Dr. Kristina Hesbol, Associate Professor at the

University of Denver, facilitated monthly meetings between the leaders from each participating school. As they shared stories about the impact of these partnerships, one in particular was especially moving.



The Welsh school of this pair was located about 40 miles from Cardiff, Wales, the country’s capital. Their American counterpart was in California’s Central Valley. During the first classroom planning meeting, the students from both schools decided that they wanted to actually write letters and take photos to share with their partners across the ocean. They declined the opportunity to meet electronically and then collaboratively planned what they wanted to know about each other – and what they wanted to share.

Each student had a student partner – across the ocean. Each handwrote an initial letter to their new “friend,” explaining a bit about who they are, about their family, where they live, and what they like to do. The letters were sent monthly at first, and as a student received a letter and the accompanying photos, many decided to write more often. Students began to learn about the history of the area they live in, and their teachers (and families) found them to be increasingly engaged in their place-based interests. Many asked their families to take them on weekend hikes through their rural community, learning about where they (and many generations of their families) called home.

Late in the afternoon on a Thursday, one of the Welsh head teachers reported that a student knocked at his office door and asked if the school leader had time for a brief meeting with his parents. The head teacher was delighted to see this student’s parents, who has spent little time at the school and seldom attended school conferences. He greeted them and invited them into his office.

Their family had never been out of their small, rural town which had housed a large manufacturing plant; the plant closed twenty years ago, and many former plant employees, residents of the small community, had fallen on hard times. Their son was a participant in the REAB project – and for the first time, began to show pride and an interest in their rural community. He asked his parents to drive him out to a waterfall several miles from their home. He’d only heard about it but had never seen it, and they went as a family. They hiked trails through a forested area not far from their home, and their son took photos that he printed to send to his American REAB partner. The father told him that he’d get “straight to the point” – and began to cry. For the first time, the parents saw their son take pride in their beautiful countryside, inspiring them to look beyond the shuttered factory and, instead, to focus on the waving fields of grain and the natural beauty of the land surrounding them. The student’s mother extended her hand to shake the head teacher’s hand in gratitude, thanking him for participating in this project that provided such a deeply meaningful and new-found sense of pride in their son – that he shared

with his family. They had believed for years that good things happened in Cardiff, but they “weren’t good enough” to go there. As a result of the partnership, their student now had an interest in other rural parts of Wales and was fascinated by photos sent by his American counterpart showing agricultural fields and orchards of fruit trees in the Central Valley of California.

At our last Leadership Team meeting, leaders of the partner schools shared similar stories. The project cost nothing – it only required teachers who were willing to try something with a counterpart in another country, as well as a school leader who would support them. The leaders described how students in their REAB teacher’s classroom developed a keen interest in history and geography at the local, regional, and international levels. Through this project, the students, their teachers, and their school leaders in the UK and the US learned how much they have in common, how much they have to share about the place they live, and how much more they want to learn about other places like their own.



CIRCLE Highlights In Past Two Years

November 2, 2023

CIRCLE's Collaboration with the University of Glasgow

Associate Professor Kristina Hesbol, CIRCLE's Founding Director (UCEA Center for Innovative Rural Collaboration for Leadership in Education), presented at the Advanced Research Center of the University of Glasgow to bridge the gap between innovative rural school leadership and collaborative networks that support organizational improvement in education.

Exciting Update on CIRCLE's Collaboration with the University of Glasgow November 2, 2023



University of Glasgow

November 16, 2023

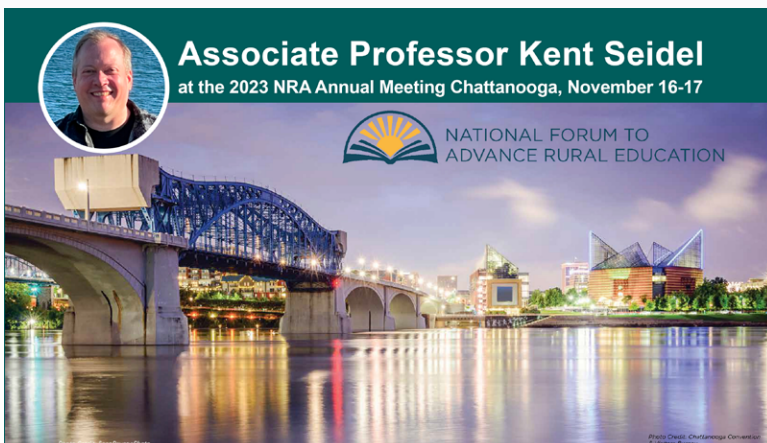
CIRCLE at the 2023 NREA Annual Meeting Chattanooga



Associate Professor Kent Seidel
at the 2023 NRA Annual Meeting Chattanooga, November 16-17



NATIONAL FORUM TO
ADVANCE RURAL EDUCATION



Associate Professor Kent Seidel, the Founding Director of the Center for Practice Engaged Education Research (C-PEER), shared our collaborative insights through an invited panel presentation at the National Rural Education Association (NREA) annual meeting.

November 18, 2023

CIRCLE at 2023 UCEA Annual Meeting, Minneapolis



**CIRCLE at 2023 UCEA Annual Meeting,
Minneapolis, Nov 16-18**

Dr. Kent Seidel from UC Denver delivered several presentations at the 37th Annual University Council for Educational Administration Convention (UCEA) held on November 16-18th, 2023, at Hyatt Regency Minneapolis, MN.

December 9, 2023

CIRCLE at the CASB Annual Convention

Dr. Kristina Hesbol, Associate Professor at the University of Denver and Founding Director of CIRCLE, shared her research findings on the San Luis Valley and South Central Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) at the 83rd Annual Convention of the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB). The event took place from December 7 to 9, 2023, at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs.



April 15, 2023

CIRCLE at the 2024 AERA Annual Meeting Philadelphia



CIRCLE proudly announced that Dr. Kent Seidel, an Associate Professor from the University of Colorado Denver, and Dr. Kristina Hesbol, an Associate Professor from the University of Colorado Denver, presented at the 2024 American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

May 16, 2024

CIRCLE named Advisory Board of Colorado Center, Rural Education



We are pleased to announce that CIRCLE has been named to the Colorado Center for Rural Education advisory board at the University of Northern Colorado. CIRCLE made two presentations on May 16 (online) and May 23 (in person) as part of this new role.

June 20, 2024

CIRCLE Leads National Research to Empower Rural Schools

Associate Professor Kristina Hesbol, CIRCLE's Founding Director (UCEA Center for Innovative Rural Collaboration for Leadership in Education), presented at the Advanced Research Center of the University of Glasgow to bridge the gap between innovative rural school leadership and collaborative networks that support organizational improvement in education.



October 10, 2024

CIRCLE at the 3rd Annual Rural Education Summit 2024



Associate Professor Kent Seidel, the Founding Director of the Center for Practice Engaged Education Research (C-PEER), shared our collaborative insights through an invited panel presentation at the National Rural Education Association (NREA) annual meeting.

October 31, 2024

CIRCLE at 2024 NREA Annual Meeting in Savannah, GA

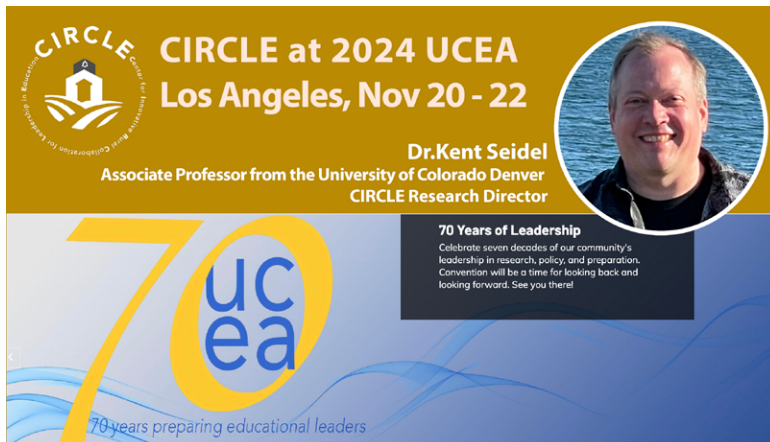


CIRCLE proudly shares that Dr. Kent Seidel, an Associate Professor at the University of Colorado Denver, and Dr. Kristina Hesbol, an Associate Professor at the University of Colorado Denver, will present at the National Forum to Advance Rural Education!

November 21, 2024

CIRCLE at 2024 UCEA Annual Meeting in Los Angeles

We are thrilled to announce that Dr. Kristina Hesbol, Associate Professor at the University of Denver and Founding Director of CIRCLE, and Dr. Kent Seidel, Associate Professor from the University of Colorado Denver and CIRCLE Research Director will present at the 2024 UCEA Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, California, on November 20–21.





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