

LEVERAGING SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN RURAL SETTINGS

Stacy A. Pinto, PhD, NCC, LPCC, CSC
Jillian M. Blueford, PhD, NCC, LPC, CT, FT
2025 University of Denver Rural Summit



ABOUT US



Stacy A. Pinto, PhD, NCC, LPCC, CSC

She/They

Clinical Associate Professor, School Counseling
Department Chair, Counseling Psychology
University of Denver



ABOUT US



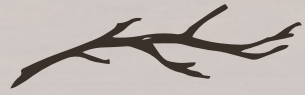
Jillian M. Blueford, PhD, NCC, LPC, CT, FT

She/Her

Clinical Associate Professor, School Counseling
Program Director, School Counseling
University of Denver



ABOUT YOU



AGENDA



- Rural-Specific Challenges
- Trauma-Informed Care in Rural Schools
- Collaboration & Partnerships
- Creative Resource Allocation Strategies
- Advocacy & Systems Change
- Comments & Curiosities

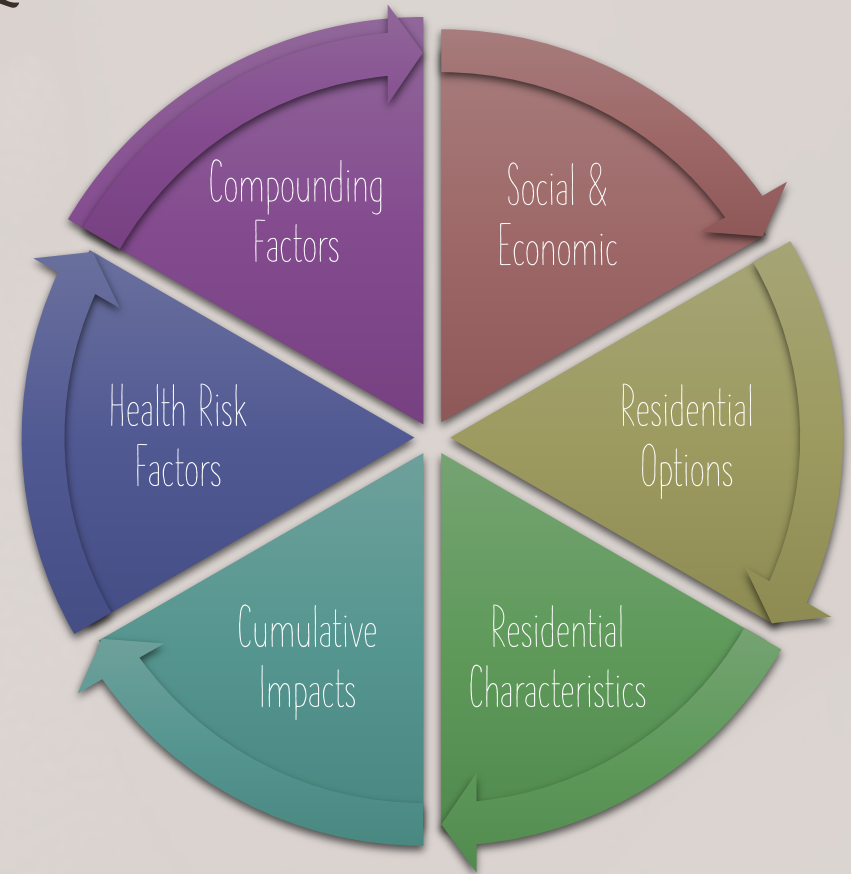
RURAL-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES



DISPARITIES



- Limited access to mental health professionals
- Geographic and social isolation
- Stigma around mental health and help-seeking



(Break the Cycle, 2024; Chessmond et al., 2020; Ferris-Day et al., 2021)

LIMITED RESOURCES



- High student-to-counselor ratios
- Conflated responsibilities: "wear[ing] many hats" (Boulden et al., 2022)
 - in the absence of other school-based mental health professionals
 - assuming administrative roles

chronic absenteeism



graduation rates



academic outcomes



(Boulden et al., 2022; Carey et al., 2012; Grimes, 2020)

With a colleague, share examples of barriers that you've experienced in your professional role that were not previously discussed.

How have you attempted to address these barriers?

Brain Dump



TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE IN RURAL SCHOOLS



THE 4 Rs



Realize

Acknowledge trauma

Know the role of trauma

Check in regularly; ask questions

Recognize

Identify triggers

Empower students to use their learning brain

Facilitate effective responses

Respond

Help students feel seen and heard

Provide digestible information

Create opportunities for student choice, expression, and therapeutic services

Resist

Recognize pain points

Ask students/families what will support their healing

Collaborate to cultivate a trauma-informed school

(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014)

RECOGNIZING TRAUMA IN RURAL STUDENTS



- Over two-thirds of children report experiencing at least one traumatic event by age 16 (e.g., direct experience, witness)
- Identifying an experience as traumatic is subjective
 - Threshold for stress and coping

PRACTICAL TRAUMA-INFORMED STRATEGIES



- Our reactions to someone's trauma response can cause more harm
- Fostering healing and building trust
- Revisiting and revising policy and processes (e.g., attendance, discipline)
 - Seeking input from students!

COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIPS



COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIPS



	Within the school	Within the community
Curated environment	X	
Local assets		X
Building trust	X	X
Curriculum	X	X

(Bright, 2018; Bright, 2020; Corbett, 2016; Gagnon & Mattingly, 2016)

SHARE-OUT



What are some examples of successful school-community collaborations of which you've been a part in the past?





CREATIVE RESOURCE ALLOCATION STRATEGIES



TOOLS



- Free resources
 - Technology (e.g., CASEL, Empatico)
 - Templates (e.g., journaling)
- Technology
 - Streamline data collection/distribution
 - Caregiver communication



COMMON GOALS



- Mentoring programs
- Trained peer leaders
- Teacher allies
- SEL integration
- Project-based, community-engaged learning

ADVOCACY & SYSTEMS CHANGE



ADVOCACY & SYSTEMS CHANGE



- How school personnel can support school counselors
- Elevating the school counselor role in district decisions
- Engaging with local and federal policymakers, departments of education, and school boards
- Data collection and storytelling for advocacy

With a colleague, share one strategy that you could see yourself implementing and why you chose that strategy.

Brain Dump



COMMENTS & CURIOSITIES



loose ends?

ideas?

concerns?



REFERENCE LIST



- Boulden, R., Brown, C., & Coffield, E. (2022). "The single fish in the sea": Exploring the Lived Experiences of Rural School Counselors Earning RAMP. *Professional School Counseling*, 26(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X211044145>
- Bright, D. J. (2018). The rural gap: The need for exploration and intervention. *Journal of School Counseling*, 16(21), 1-27.
- Bright, D. J. (2020). Rural Community Dynamics: Implications for School Counselors. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 13(3). <http://doi.org/10.7729/42.1395>
- Carey, J., Harrington, K., Martin, I., & Stevenson, D. (2012). A statewide evaluation of the outcomes of the implementation national model school counseling programs in Utah high schools. *Professional School Counseling*, 16(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X0001600203>
- Corbett, M. (2016). Reading Lefebvre from the periphery: Thinking globally about the rural. In A.K. Schulte & B. Walker-Gibbs (Eds.), *Self-studies in rural teacher education* (pp. 141-156). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-17488-4_8C
- Cheesmond, N., Davies, K., & Inder, K. J. (2020). The role of the peer support worker in increasing rural mental health help-seeking. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 28(2), 203-208. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12603>
- Ferris-Day, P., Hoare, K., Wilson, R. L., Minton, C., & Donaldson, A. (2021). An integrated review of the barriers and facilitators for accessing and engaging with mental health in a rural setting. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 30(6), 1525-1538. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12929>
- Gagnon, D., & Mattingly, M. (2016). Most U. S. school districts have low access to school counselors: Poor, diverse, and city school districts exhibit particularly high student-to-counselor ratios. Carsey School of Public Policy at the Scholars' 27 Repository. *National Issue Brief #108*. <https://doi.org/10.34051/p/2020.2756>.
- Grimes, T. O. (2020). Exploring the Phenomenon of Rural School Counselors' Professional Identity Construction. *Professional School Counseling*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X20965180>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2024) *Child trauma*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/trauma-violence/child-trauma>

THANK YOU!



Stacy Pinto

Stacy.Pinto@du.edu

Jillian Blueford

Jillian.Blueford@du.edu

DOWNLOAD OUR SLIDES

