

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **A First-of-its-Kind Report on the Status and Health of Rural Illinois Career & Technical Education Programming**

**MACOMB, IL, AUGUST 2024** – [The Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools](#) (AIRSS) has recently completed a year-long research initiative with the [Illinois State Board of Education](#) and the [Western Illinois University Seymour Center for Rural Education](#) to catalog the needs and equity gaps of career and technical education programs (CTE) across Illinois rural school districts, called the [Rural IL CTE Project](#). As the voice for rural education advocacy and policy in the state, AIRSS viewed this as an invaluable opportunity to work with state agencies and higher education partners on systematically mapping the challenges and growth opportunities for rural districts in a discipline that is closely related to the immediate success of students, and the future vitality of the larger community.

Pervasive and persistent challenges such as an educator shortage, lack of qualified educator candidates, and resource and facility deficits plague CTE courses. Similarly, there are clear gaps in the quality and quantity of services and opportunities available to rural programs as compared to their non-rural peers. Although it was anticipated from the start that these historic and ongoing challenges were impacting rural CTE, the main goal of the Rural IL CTE Project was to uncover precisely how these challenges were limiting rural districts, as well as other issues unique to CTE. This goal was pursued through four primary data collection methods: state-wide surveys, focus group conversations, advisory council meetings, and site visits. The findings from these four methods were analyzed to produce a core set of policy recommendations to strengthen rural CTE. Together, the data, findings, and recommendations are fueling a second year of research as well as a host of targeted technical assistance and asset mapping to support rural CTE programs.

The complete set of data, analysis, and policy recommendations can be found in the Rural IL CTE Project's final 2024 report: [Growing Rural IL Success through CTE Programs](#). You may view the report online via the Rural IL CTE Project Portal. All are encouraged to read the report, consider its findings and discussion points, and reach out to AIRSS and Project Director John Glasgow with any reflections and questions.