Purpose: This project will improve the quality of and support for rural students in a special education teacher preparation program through a combined focus on distance education, alignment of coursework with evidence-based practice, integration of meaningful clinical and field experiences, and strengthened supervision of such experiences.

Method: To address the shortage of special education teachers in rural areas, the project will rely on distance education delivery to recruit teacher candidates from the rural areas where they live, which can help eliminate the problems of high turnover and attrition that is common to those areas. The project will also align coursework in this program with research-based practice in order to parallel state efforts in implementing a Response to Intervention model of service delivery. Also, together with the Idaho State Department of Education, the project will provide summer institutes and ongoing professional development opportunities to prepare both candidate and mentor teachers in rural areas. Mentor teachers will supervise structured field experiences that are integrated with the online certification courses. This collaboration provides the structure through which candidate teachers can make concrete applications of theory and pedagogy, analyze and address problems of practice, and engage in inquiry and reflection about learning, teaching, and curriculum.

Products: