**Matt Seimears:** There's a hundred years of research and it shows that if a high school closes, the town will remain. If the middle school closes, the town will remain. If the elementary school closes, the town will begin to die. And I know that by personal experience coming from Kansas. My dad grew up in a town called Severy, Kansas. It maintained longevity until the elementary school closed and then it became a ghost town. Parents of children will not move to a town where there's no school.

**Shannon Criss:** We are in a teacher shortage right now, and in talking with universities, it's been a struggle to try and find teachers who want to commit to rural, one-room schoolhouse life. Sometimes we'll get a teacher that will come out and they're here a year and it's like, "Oh my. I didn't realize that I'm 100 miles away from anything."

**Matt Seimears:** We are what's considered an education preparation provider in the state of Oregon. So we're constantly looking at innovative ways to train the future educator or what we call pre-service teacher candidates.

**Shannon Criss:** Eastern Oregon University has been fantastic at saying, "What can we do to help support the shortage of rural teachers?" And I think one of the big things is getting pre-service teachers out here to experience what is it. And I know there are ten rural, one-room schoolhouse teachers in Harney County, and they would open their classroom doors to anybody that wanted to come out.

**Evan Yzaguirre:** So I decided to participate in the Teach Rural Oregon program because I wanted to go out and I wanted to experience what it would be like teaching in a small town rather than teaching in a larger city like where I'm from.

**Elsy Spears:** Going to the different schools within the experience, I've been able to collect and gather ideas that each teacher has, you know, like how to support the student both emotionally and academically.

**Matt Seimears:** We are working with our educator equity plans and the money's there. So we're offering scholarships through our Oregon teacher pathway and then also our CCRP, which is Center for Culturally Responsive Practices, which is providing professional development training for classroom teachers and all. So we're kind of becoming a magnet for recruiting those with diverse possibilities for becoming teachers.

**Karen Patton:** This program is the first one that seems to have broken down some of the barriers that we have faced when trying to bring that kind of outreach. In the past, we didn't have the funds to pay for people to come. Housing was a barrier. There were... There were just some things that this program built that made it more possible that we haven't been able to do in the past.

**Billie Jacobs:** The university has taken care of everything. They've treated me really well. They made sure I was set up at the hotel. They made sure I had food, everything.

**Alexa Edwards:** They got everything coordinated with the school. So I didn't really have to do any of that work. They were sending me emails just telling me what I was going to be doing, what to expect, what to be ready for. And then I packed up my car and drove down by myself.

**Elsy Spears:** You gain a lot from it. For me, it was wanting to see the difference between a big city and a small town. And if you do live in a big city, you know this is a great opportunity. If you do live in a small town, it's still an opportunity for you to meet others and see the location and maybe fall in love with the area and, you know, end up moving.

**Alexa Edwards:** I would encourage people to not just stay within the schools, but to go out and to experience the community.

**Heidi Sipe:** Every small community has its own personality and its own traditions and its own fit. And I think it's wonderful for students to have an opportunity to explore Eastern Oregon throughout its entirety and to really get a feel for the various communities and the different aspects of each of those communities so they can start to see themselves as educators and really figure out where they fit and which schools they want to work in.

**Billie Jacobs:** If somebody told me they were thinking about joining an experience like this, I would say do it because it has been a wonderful, wonderful experience for me. In a normal practicum, you might only be there every other day or for different times. With this, you're consistent so you can make those relationships and connections better so you have a better opportunity to get to know the students.

**Madyson Loop:** It's a learning experience and I feel like you get to take a lot away from this. With the teacher that I'm with here, everything that she does, she gives me the reason behind it so that I'm able to save it for my, like, teacher belt or my teacher tools so that I can use it later on.

**Jodi Miller:** In a small rural school, I'm not going to say it's easy, but if you are an experienced or even a new teacher, it's not hard to figure out. Because if you have that love of teaching, if you have that desire to reach those kids and you know the material in which you're presenting them, and how might I do this so I can incorporate more than one? That's the secret of it. That is being able to use everything that you have within you and make it a worthwhile experience for not just one, but for the whole class.

**Evan Yzaguirre:** In larger schools, you might not have the staff or the resources to really give students the one on one attention that they need. At this school, however, they have a lot of assistance. They have teachers that work really, really well together. They're always helping each other out. And I think they put a lot of time into their students and it shows in how happy their student population is.

**Shannon Criss:** To see the connections that the teachers make with these kids is just... It's so heartwarming. These teachers are an integral part of... They're it in many of the communities. There's a high level of respect for them.

**Jodi Miller:** As far as teaching in the rural schools, I just believe that there's something special out here. That connection you make with the parent, with the neighbor that lives down the road. They're always there ready to help. I truly enjoy it.