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More than half of all college students who declare a major in STEM fields drop out or change their majors in the first two years of their post-secondary education. This problem is particularly acute for rural first-generation college students. First2 STEM Success Network, an NSF INCLUDES Alliance, purpose is to improve retention and success for rural, first generation STEM students in the first 2 years of the undergraduate curriculum.

As researchers on the project, we look to paint an accurate picture of what it means to be rural and first generation in West Virginia and to use this information to determine what factors help students persist and succeed in STEM majors. If a student's parent(s) or guardian did not attend college and if they are from a rural area, what then might attribute to their decision to attend college and major in a STEM field and what factors lead them to persist and succeed in their major? This presentation will outline the steps the researchers in the INCLUDES project are using to try to answer these questions.