MENTORING MATTERS
Remarks from students participating in the Kent State Rural Scholars Program in Columbiana County:

“It gives me someone to talk to and look to for guidance. They have all already been in my shoes, going through high school and dealing with all the same stuff. It’s nice just to have a mentor there.”

“They have helped me figure out what I want to be when I grow up and what I would have to do to become what I want to be.”

“Mentors keep us engaged in the program. They bring in fun games, snacks, help with personal problems, homework, everything you can think of.”

“Every mentor I’ve had has taught me something valuable and has also been a friend in general.”

“I valued having a mentor this year because she has guided me in ways no other could. She was a great role model.”

AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE
The primary measures of success for the Rising Scholars Program are:

» At least 40% of the students will complete the five-year program
» At least 90% of the students will graduate from high school
» All program graduates will pursue additional postsecondary education
» At least 50% of the Rising Scholars who graduate from high school will enroll in a college or university
» The Rising Scholar will require little or no remediation at the college level
» Scholars receiving sponsored scholarships will commit to working in Northeast Ohio for a specified amount of time after graduation from college

The Kent State Ashtabula Rising Scholars Program can become a model for increasing the number of rural, low-income students who pursue higher education and graduate from college.

CREATING A PATH FROM POVERTY TO PROSPERITY

» Increase high school graduation rates, enhance college readiness and improve college/postsecondary attendance in rural counties.

» Prepare a technically skilled, professionally trained workforce to promote economic growth in the region.

» Support the success of students who have promising academic ability, but may not have access to social and educational opportunities that will allow them to reach their potential.

» Provide sponsored scholarships to cover tuition at Kent State Ashtabula for Rising Scholars and their student mentors.
Rural students enroll in college at lower rates than any other geographically defined group - just 59% enrolled in 2017.

Much of the debate at the state and federal levels over high school reform has focused on big city schools. However, more than one fifth of the nation’s 2,000 lowest performing high schools are located in rural areas. Ohio, which has the fourth largest enrollment of rural students in the country, needs to address this rural achievement gap in order to improve educational attainment and economic development. Innovative interventions are needed that will increase the high school graduation rate, enhance college readiness, and improve college/postsecondary attendance in rural communities.

Rural students face many barriers, including generational poverty, lack of role models, and insufficient academic preparation. This is clearly evident at the Kent State regional campuses, where 81 percent of students receive financial aid, much of it Pell Grants, and the majority of students require remediation.

The need to prepare a skilled, professional workforce to ensure the prosperity of Ashtabula County could not be greater. The Kent State University at Ashtabula Rising Scholars Program is designed to increase the number of students who continue their education beyond high school, are college ready and enter the workforce with skills that will enhance the economic growth of the region.

CREATING A PROGRAM FOR SUCCESS
A substantial portion of the student population at Kent State Ashtabula graduated from Ashtabula Area City Schools and have struggled with high drop-out rates and low graduation rates.

Research was undertaken to identify “best practices” addressing innovative rural programs developed to increase the number of students who graduate from high school prepared for college or a career, and improve the likelihood that students will successfully complete college. Based on the results of this research, the Kent State Rural Scholars program began in 2012 as a partnership with four local schools in Columbiana County.

The primary focus of the Rising Scholars Program is to support the success of a select group of students who have promising academic ability but are not performing up to their potential. These students, the Rising Scholars, are identified by the school district at the end of 6th grade. Once admitted to the program, they will participate in all of the following through high school graduation:

- Weekly mentoring from Kent State students
- An intense summer workshop that focuses on academic skills
- Biannual one-day workshops that emphasize the connection between education and local career paths
- Students are supervised and guided through these experiences over a six-year period until they enroll in postsecondary education. If the Rising Scholar participates in the program and elects to attend college, he or she becomes eligible for a sponsored scholarship that will cover the cost of tuition at Kent State Ashtabula. Following the pay-it-back model, to be eligible for the tuition scholarships, Rising Scholars must have participated in the entire program, maintained a minimum 2.5 GPA, and agreed to serve as a university student mentor for new scholars entering the program.

Participation in the highly successful College Credit Plus (CCP) program, where students can earn college credit while still in high school, is also encouraged. Several national studies have found that students who earn six or more college credits in high school are more likely to graduate college.

A key strength of the Rising Scholars Program is the commitment to leveraging existing local resources like transportation programs, college faculty volunteers, student mentors and a motivated advisory group of leaders in business.

The Rising Scholars Program will work with 7th grade students in the Ashtabula Area City School District and sponsor scholarships for Kent State Ashtabula mentors. As the program expands, we hope to reach all school districts in Ashtabula County.

By 2020, 64% of jobs in Ohio will require postsecondary education.
- Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

RISING SCHOLARS WILL BE:
- Academically Successful
- Engaged Learners
- Workforce Ready
- Socially Savvy
- Committed to Community

ASHTABULA COUNTY STUDENTS
- 15% don’t graduate from high school (21% for Ashtabula City)
- Only 13% of adults 25 or older have a four-year degree (9.4% for Ashtabula city)

KENT STATE ASHTABULA STUDENTS
- 80% require remedial mathematics (entering Fall 2017)
- 40% require remedial English (entering Fall 2017)
- Nationally, only 35% who require remedial courses will graduate within six years (Ohio: 33.8%). Degree completion on time for students who take remedial courses is less than 10%.

The program includes comprehensive support for Rising Scholars from middle through high school. Rising Scholars requires local funding to support scholarships for university student mentors – the single largest budget item – as well as programming costs.