



The Rural Solution

How Community Schools Can Reinvigorate Rural Education

Doris Terry Williams, Rural School and Community Trust September 2010

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

One in five students in the United States—19.4 percent—attends a public elementary or secondary school designated as rural. The view outside the classroom window for some of these students is “one of scenic fields, pasture lands, or forests nestled at the base of mountains.”¹ But variations across rural America can be stunning. Some students have a view of the polluted coastline where their parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents *used to* make a living, the abandoned mining equipment that once tied their families’ livelihoods to the company store, or the vast clear-cut space that was once a forest amid rolling hills. These visual contrasts mirror the diverse cultural, social, economic, and political realities that make rural places what they are today.

The situations surrounding rural education—like the views from the classroom windows—vary widely from place to place. But what rural places have in common is the challenge to provide a quality education to ensure the success of some 10 million students. This challenge often comes with difficult odds—inadequate financing, teacher shortages, and inaccessible or unaffordable services for children and families. The partnerships and approach of “full-service community schools” may hold the greatest potential for addressing rural education’s challenges and ensuring that every child has at least a near-equal opportunity to succeed.

This paper combines data from the literature and other public sources, interviews, site visits, and the organizational experience of The Rural School and Community Trust in an examination of community schools from a rural perspective. It provides a context for rural community schools and discusses the need for clarification of the language used to describe the concept of community school. Three examples of successful rural community schools provide a framework for discussing the benefits, characteristics, and policy implications of rural community schools.

The paper also discusses the challenges that rural areas confront in attempting to implement a community school strategy and offers recommendations for overcoming them:

- **States and rural districts should develop a rural teacher recruitment strategy that emphasizes the benefits of teaching in a community school.** An important aspect of state rural recruitment strategies could be permitting local school boards to implement community educator certification programs. This would allow school districts to place highly skilled and knowledgeable community members in classrooms under the supervision of highly qualified, highly effective teachers of record. This type of program can facilitate the movement of parent and community volunteers into the teaching profession in understaffed areas, particularly when combined with emerging “grow-your-own” teacher recruitment and retention strategies.
- **Rural schools and districts should remove barriers to substantive parental and community engagement in schools.** Districts and schools can develop programs and services that bring adults into the school building both as consumers and as volunteers, and they can revise policies that discourage parent and community engagement. Schools should partner with community-based, nongovernmental organizations to provide alternative venues for parents and community members to participate in decision making and interact with children in academic and nonacademic contexts.
- **New school planning should incorporate multiple related community needs.** Local governments should consider bringing together schools and child and family services under the same roof before deciding to build new structures or otherwise providing separate housing for schools and services. States should harmonize construction standards by categorical funding sources when it does not compromise the public purpose served by the standards.
- **States should help to reduce financial risk to community school partners when they undertake new construction projects.** State legislatures should create and administer a joint-use-guarantee fund that insures against loss of fiscal capacity to meet bond payments when a partner is forced to abandon the joint-use facilities before the terms of the financing are fulfilled due to state or local government action. Legislatures should also create a Rural Joint Use Public Facilities Commission to identify statutory and administrative barriers to joint-use facilities and recommend policy changes specific to their respective states.
- **Congress and state legislatures should provide incentives for, and place special emphasis on, the development and implementation of community schools as a turnaround strategy for high-needs Title I and other low-performing schools**

in rural areas. The current restructuring strategy for underperforming Title I schools requires the district to replace teachers and school leaders. This strategy is often not feasible for rural schools that have a smaller pool of potential teachers and administrators from which to draw. Community schools are a promising alternative strategy for these schools in rural areas.

- **Congress and state legislatures should increase investments in community schools.** State governments should fund strategic planning processes for community school development and implementation in rural places, the federal government should increase funding for the Full Service Community Schools Program, and the U.S. Department of Education should provide technical assistance through intermediary organizations to help level the field for rural districts in competitive grant competitions.

Full-service community schools may well provide the greatest opportunity for quality education and success in rural communities where resources are few. Community schools offer a much-needed alternative to traditional schooling models even in rural communities that are not economically stressed.

The rural landscape

There is no single profile for rural America. There is likewise no single profile for rural schools. Different challenges and opportunities abound in every rural school community. These challenges and opportunities often are left unattended by policymakers, philanthropic entities, and others. Yet there is little that our nation can do to change our overall education picture if it leaves behind rural schools, children, and communities.

Rural schools

The National Center for Education Statistics has designated nearly one-third (32.3 percent) of the public elementary and secondary schools in America as rural. The percentages of rural schools range from 9.5 percent in the state of New Jersey to 76.9 percent in South Dakota. There are 15 states where more than half of all schools are rural: South Dakota, Montana, North Dakota, Vermont, Maine, Alaska, Nebraska, Wyoming, Arkansas, Iowa, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, Alabama, West Virginia, and Kansas. At least one-third of the schools are rural in 14 other states. States that are sparsely populated or where transportation is difficult tend to have the highest percentages of rural schools.²

Rural school and district size

Almost one-third (30.5 percent) of the nation's rural school districts are considered small, which means that enrollment is below 535 students—the median enrollment for public school districts in the United States. At least half of the rural districts in eight states fall into this category: North Dakota, Montana, Vermont, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Maine, and Alaska.³

Districts tend to be smaller overall in rural places, but there are wide variations in district size. Rural, high-poverty districts that serve a disproportionately high

number of African-American students are more likely to be countywide or near countywide and have larger schools.⁴ This also holds true for districts with large numbers of Hispanic-Latino students.

Small school size is one of the advantages presented by rural education. More than 40 years of research indicates that, compared to students who attend larger schools, students who attend small schools achieve at equal or higher rates, graduate at higher rates, and exhibit fewer behavioral problems. Research also indicates that small size is particularly beneficial for students performing in the lowest quartile on standardized tests and for students who live in poverty.⁵

Rural school students

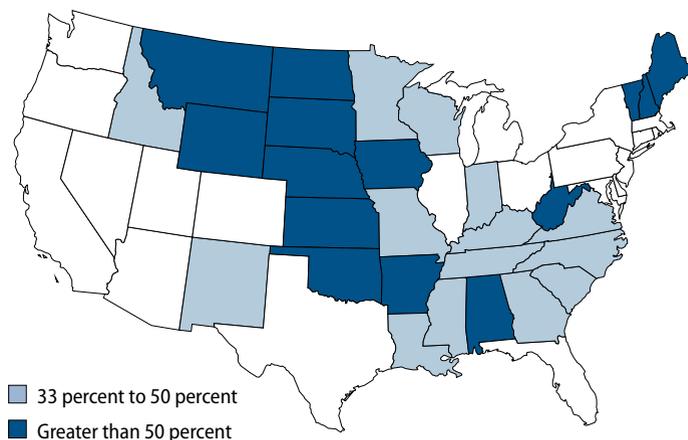
Some 19.4 percent of students in U.S. public schools—9,039,731—attend schools in NCES-designated rural districts. This figure excludes students in rural schools situated in districts that are not designated as rural, which accounts for the difference between this number and the 10 million mentioned earlier.

More than half of all rural students attend school in 11 states: North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Tennessee, Michigan, California, and Alabama. Four of those states together serve one-fourth of all rural students in the United States: North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, and Ohio.⁶

Rural students graduate from high school at higher rates than nonrural students overall, and the graduation rate in remote rural districts has historically been higher than in rural districts that are on the fringes of more urban or suburban areas.⁷ But the picture is again uneven across rural places.

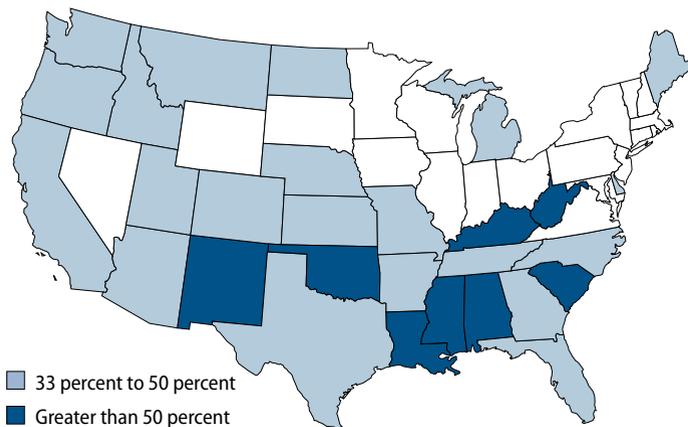
The Rural Trust studied graduation rates in 616 of the nation's poorest rural districts and found that the graduation rate of just over 60 percent in those districts was nearly 10 percentage points lower than the rate for other rural districts (70 percent), and nearly seven points below the rate for nonrural districts (67 percent). These high-poverty districts are concentrated in 15 states. Approximately

Percent of public schools that are rural by state



Jerry Johnson & Marty Strange, "Why Rural Matters: 2009" (Arlington: The Rural School & Community Trust, 2009).

Percent of rural students living in poverty by state



Jerry Johnson & Marty Strange, "Why Rural Matters: 2009" (Arlington: The Rural School & Community Trust, 2009).

60 percent of students in these districts are students of color, and the poverty rate among them is more than double that in other districts. Students in these districts are twice as likely as other rural students and 24 percent more likely than students in all other districts to be English language learners. Districts with the lowest graduation rates tend to serve disproportionately high numbers of children of color.⁸

The Rural Trust study also identified 20 high-performing districts among the 616 high-poverty districts.⁹ These high-performing districts ranked in the top 20 percent in graduation rates

in their respective states and in reading and mathematics proficiency on their 2007-2008 state content exams. The most notable difference between the high-performing and low-performing districts was racial composition: 83 percent of students in the high-performing high-poverty districts were white, and English language learners made up less than 1 percent of the student population.

Rural school finance

The highest poverty rural districts spend less money per pupil than other districts. The 616 high-poverty districts mentioned earlier spend \$7,731 per pupil compared to \$8,134 for all other rural districts and \$9,611 for nonrural districts nationally.¹⁰ This funding disparity creates inequities in other areas as well, including teacher pay and facilities, which can be attributed in large part to flawed school finance strategies that reinforce a dependency on local budgets, competitive grants, and funding formulas that result in inequitable support of rural versus nonrural districts. Six states spend less than \$4,500 per student in their poorest rural district, and seven other states spend less than \$5,000.¹¹

The rural school challenge and community school opportunity

Rural schools are expected to provide a quality education for all students while overcoming challenges such as transportation barriers, strained resources, and lack of access to needed services. Yet these schools are most often at the mercy of others who are external to the school system to provide them with the means to accomplish that goal. School districts depend primarily upon funding made available by local, state, and federal policymakers. The ability to attract and retain effective teachers, provide and maintain suitable facilities, and have children enter school ready to learn are all issues that extend beyond the school itself. These issues take on particular significance in rural areas, and all sectors of the community and all levels of government must see them as a shared responsibility.

Issues facing rural schools

Finding the will to educate

The history of race, power, and oppression in the United States, combined with the disadvantages suffered disproportionately by children of color and children of poverty, suggests that providing a quality education for all children may be as much a matter of political will as it is a matter of resources in many rural communities. The problem is especially prevalent in the rural South where the high number and percentage of rural children of color lead many to believe that the quality of education is a manifestation of systematic, institutionalized oppression.¹²

The National Algebra Project, founded by distinguished scholar and Civil Rights icon Bob Moses, has compared the current crisis in the education of poor children and children of color to the systematically contrived illiteracy of sharecroppers who were denied an education and subsequently denied the right to vote because of their illiteracy. “Sharecropper illiteracy,” the organization stated in a memorandum to participants in its first national conference on quality education, “was the hidden subtext of the struggle for the right to vote and the systematic denial of the

opportunity for a quality public school education has been the hidden subtext of the struggle for political rights in the broadest sense in this country.”¹³ The history of Native-American education in the United States raises similar concerns.

Attracting and retaining effective teachers

Schools across the country struggle to attract and retain effective teachers. Many rural schools face the unique challenge of trying to attract teachers to high-needs, low-amenity areas while being unable to pay salaries competitive with suburban and urban schools.¹⁴ Rural schools are often forced to take drastic measures to overcome teacher shortages including consolidating classes, employing out-of-field teachers, and decreasing course offerings.¹⁵

Addressing students’ special needs

Rural students face many of the same difficulties as urban students in receiving much-needed health and social services. The low number of health care providers in rural areas limits access to physical, mental health, and dental.¹⁶ Distance and limited transportation options may make it difficult for families to tap into services that might be provided by informal associations and organizations, as well as the more formal social service providers such as county welfare offices, public health services, and food distribution centers.

Providing access to community institutions

Many rural students spend two hours or more a day getting to and from school. The time required to go to and from school can reduce opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular and after-school enrichment activities. Students may also travel from areas where access to community institutions such as libraries, parks, recreation centers, and theaters is limited or nonexistent.

Maintaining public facilities

Many rural communities need new or upgraded public facilities, including new school buildings, but funding new construction and upgrading existing structures is a persistent challenge.¹⁷ Rural school districts especially suffer when school

construction allocations are tied to property values since they tend to have lower property value assessments. Older rural residents who live in higher-value property areas and do not have school-aged children may be unwilling to pay for necessary improvements. And rural communities may find it difficult to galvanize support for bond issues, further complicating a district's ability to build new facilities.¹⁸

The community school solution

Full-service community schools are potentially an important solution to the problems confronting many rural children, families, and schools today. That can include the issues of inequity in services and of social, economic, and political injustice. Indeed, community schools hold perhaps the greatest potential of all innovations to fulfill our responsibility as a democratic society to provide a quality education for all children. The community school model can capitalize on many of the assets offered in rural schools.

Unfortunately, the community school concept is couched in language that has become so polluted that the concept sometimes gets distorted, and the language becomes a tool for promoting ill-intentioned agendas. “Neighborhood schools,” “community schools,” and “good schools close to home” can all become codes for the re-segregation of schools, most often on the basis of race but also on the basis of socioeconomic status. There must be a broader and more justice-oriented understanding of the concept of “community” in order for the concept of community schools to be useful in high-needs, racially and ethnically heterogeneous settings.

This is not to suggest that schools that are racially, ethnically, or socioeconomically distinct cannot be good community schools. It is a reminder, however, that community is not merely a geographically defined space where groups of people live with institutions and structures that serve their common interests. Community is also a place where people and institutions, including schools, collaborate to build social capital that in turn strengthens schools, families, and communities. Author Peter Block emphasizes that the term “community” insinuates both ownership and membership. Community, he says, “is about the experience of belonging.... To belong to a community is to act as a creator or co-owner of that community.... Community is the container within which our longing to be is fulfilled.”¹⁹

What, then, is a community school? The U.S. Department of Education defines a full-service community school as an “elementary or secondary school that works with its local educational agency and community-based organizations, nonprofit

organizations, and other public or private entities to provide a coordinated and integrated set of comprehensive academic, social, and health services that respond to the needs of its students, students' family members, and community members." The school's "results-focused partnerships... are based on identified needs and organized around a set of mutually defined results and outcomes."²⁰

The Coalition for Community Schools defines a community school as "both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone—all day, every day, evenings and weekends."²¹

How then can we operationalize these notions of community schools in rural areas? Engagement in community schools occurs when parents, students, school staff, and neighbors invest in the school, co-creating and owning it. There is a conscious effort to ensure that services are not merely co-located but integrated in a way that increases the social capital that goes into overcoming or removing the barriers to student, family, and community success and citizenship.

A focus on community building allows these schools to become centers that practice the basic principles of a democratic society and remove the sense of isolation, and where "service providers" see themselves and are seen as community members guided by those same principles. This deeper sense of community may make community schools unrivaled in their potential to provide quality education for all children, whether urban or rural. A commitment to the principles implied by this broader understanding of community is an opportunity to change the discourse and direction of education in rural areas. It provides an opportunity to confront the issues of race, power, and injustice that have obstructed the success of children and families and threatened the security of our nation as a whole.

The case for rural community schools

Full-service community schools have the potential to mitigate the negative influence of poverty and other ills on children's ability to succeed in school and in their adult roles later in life. Community schools might be the most economically feasible way to accomplish that goal in low-resource, rural areas. Preparing children to learn, extending learning opportunities beyond the school day, and strengthening families are but a few areas where this might be the case.

Preparing children to learn

Community schools address important predictors of adult success—academic, social, and health supports. The National Research Council has indicated that these supports are also essential for children to be ready and able to learn.²²

Transportation issues and the short supply of qualified early childhood educators obstructs access to such early supports and education in many rural settings, and low-resource rural settings in particular. The co-location and integration of early childhood and elementary education provided in full-service community schools is a solution to both of these challenges as we have seen in rural Bertie County, North Carolina.

Bertie County is located in the historically tobacco-dependent northeastern portion of North Carolina. The county's 19,000 residents are spread over 700 square miles. Bertie's population decreased by more than 2 percent between April 2000 and July 2008 compared to a 15 percent increase in the state's population over the same period. The population is majority African American (60 percent) and only 64 percent of persons 25 years old or older have completed high school. Median income in the county (\$28,531) is only 64 percent of the state's median (\$44,772), and more than a quarter (26 percent) of the population lives below poverty.²³

Bertie enrolls 73 percent of its three- and four-year-olds in structured, center-based programs at the local elementary school despite its remote location and high poverty rates. That success is attributable to the school district's aggressive leadership to increase the number of subsidized center-based slots; co-locate early education and family support programs and services throughout the district; build partnerships with higher education institutions to recruit, train, and certify local teachers and care providers; and leverage federal, state, and private programs and income streams. This kind of integration and leveraging of services and resources comes easily and naturally in a community school setting.

The academic success of Bertie's efforts is easily seen in the dramatic increases in its pre-kindergarten to fifth-grade or PK-5 proficiency rates in reading and mathematics over the past three years. Increases in reading proficiency rates ranged from approximately 6 points at Colerain Elementary School to 23 points at Aulander Elementary School (figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Percent of Bertie County elementary school students scoring at or above grade level on the state end-of-grade reading test by school

2006-2007 and 2008-2009

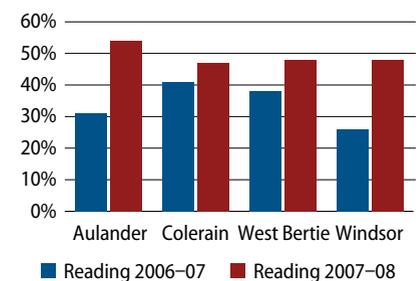
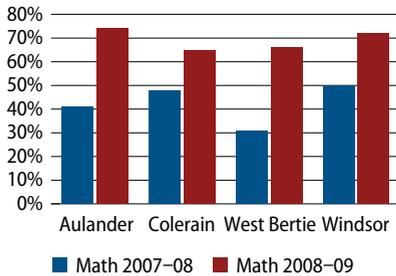


FIGURE 2
Percent of Bertie County elementary school students scoring at or above grade level on the state end-of-grade math test by school

2007-08 and 2008-09



Even greater gains are evident in mathematics with increases in proficiency rates ranging from 17 points at Colerain Elementary School to 35 points at West Bertie Elementary School (figure 2).

It is unlikely given Bertie’s deep poverty and historic low school performance that the district would have achieved these gains without co-locating, aligning, and integrating early childhood and elementary programs along with child and family services.

Extending learning opportunities

Community schools have the added benefit of extending learning opportunities for children on all academic levels, first by relieving teachers of many of the nonteaching tasks they perform during school time and then by providing high-quality, out-of-school time learning opportunities.

Teachers often fill the void left when students do not receive necessary supports and services.²⁴ Community schools reduce the strain on teachers’ time by bringing together and integrating youth development, health, and social services provided by other individuals, organizations, and agencies.

Researchers have underscored the importance of out-of-school learning noting that two-thirds of the achievement gap between higher-income and lower-income ninth graders is attributable to the cumulative effect of the differences in summer learning experiences during the elementary school years.²⁵ Yet summer programs are generally the first to be cut from school budgets during tight budget cycles. The recent national economic crunch has led many schools to eliminate summer programs all together. Even when school-based summer programs are offered, they tend to focus primarily on credit recovery, remediation, or skill building for progression to the next grade.

Just as important as academic skills are the skills and knowledge gained more readily in school-affiliated, but community-led, extended-learning programs such as problem-solving, analyzing information, generating new ideas, teamwork, and exposure to diverse groups of students. These programs “can give breadth to student learning and help students develop the skills that business leaders cite as necessary for success in a global economy.”²⁶ Community schools, unlike traditional schools that operate on a limited schedule, tend to stay open longer during the week, on weekends, and in the summer, making them ideal settings for extended learning opportunities for rural children.

Increasing parent and community engagement

Parental and community engagement is important to school success but is often difficult to achieve. Researchers in a case study of three notable urban school-community collaborations—the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago, the Camino Nuevo Charter Academy in Los Angeles, and the Quitman Street Community School in Newark—found three common elements relative to successful parent engagement.²⁷ The first was an emphasis on relationship building among parents and between parents and educators. Second was a focus on leadership development among parents. Third, and perhaps most important, was an effort to bridge the gap in culture and power between parents and educators.

The researchers contrasted these school-community collaborations with what they called the more traditional, school-centric, and individualistic approaches to parent involvement. They concluded that schools alone may not be able to achieve high levels of parent engagement, but that they can profit from the “social capital expertise” of community-based organizations. The study samples are urban, but this research holds important implications for rural as well as urban places.

Community-based organizations can act as intermediaries and build bridges between educators and parents and act as catalysts for change.

The Rural School and Community Trust’s Connecting School and Community initiative in Northeastern North Carolina documented similar findings.²⁸ The program found that partnering with community development corporations and high school alumni associations with deep roots and credibility in their rural communities proved to be strategically important to reaching and engaging a diverse group of parents and community members in a communitywide process to ensure the success of all children. Community schools naturally provide the philosophical and physical space for this kind of collaboration to occur.

Strengthening families

Full-service community schools provide a range of family support services in addition to services for children. Parent and family resource centers provide family health services, social services, and adult education programs. Adult education offerings might range from basic literacy classes, sometimes accompanied by

workforce skills training, to college degree or certification courses. Such offerings have obvious family economic benefits in that they increase parental and caregiver employability and wage-earning capacity.

These adult services also have direct benefits to children in school. A study of 45 low-income, rural Appalachian families revealed that the pre-literacy skills of more highly educated mothers' children were significantly better than those of mothers who were less educated.²⁹

Strengthening community

Community schools also hold benefits for communities as a whole. Researchers Devora Shamah and Katherine MacTavish argue that rural schools' past connections to place have been disappearing as school curricula have become more narrowly focused on basic academic skills.³⁰ They argue that reducing school programs and undervaluing place-based knowledge gained outside the classroom diminishes the school's ability to be the primary location for collective socialization and transmission of local community values. They assert that this loss has consequences for both the quality of education and opportunities offered for youth and overall community well-being. Community schools can reverse this trend and recover that loss by reconnecting young people to their local place and culture and to adults around them.

Another important benefit of full-service community schools in rural areas is facility access and use. School facilities, like local governmental agencies, are financed largely by local tax dollars. It seems to make good economic sense where resources are scarce to co-locate those services that support learning and family involvement rather than adding additional strain to local economies to build and maintain multiple facilities that stand idle a majority of the time. Schools, family resource centers, youth development programs, and dental and primary care health services need not operate in silos that shut down during the hours that many families could most readily access them.

Sustaining rural schools through economies of scale

Community schools might also provide an alternative to consolidation in places where the cost of operating and maintaining facilities is a genuine concern.

Bringing together the services in one place can again lessen the strain on local resources. Joint purchasing of co-located services and programs can at the same time reduce the cost of supplies and materials, again decreasing the strain on local budgets. Communities might also realize savings in building operations and maintenance costs. Rural community schools might well be an alternative to school consolidation in cases where economy of scale is a concern.³¹

Three examples of effective rural community schools

The following are three examples of effective rural community schools: Owsley Elementary School in Booneville, Kentucky; Molly Stark School in Bennington, Vermont; and Noble High School in North Berwick, Maine. These cases provide guidance and encouragement for low-resource, rural communities that often succumb to poverty and isolation and accept less than they would hope for their children.

Each of these community schools was designed in response to children's academic needs as well as adults' needs as they affect student achievement. Each school acknowledges that schools are not just for children and that educating a child necessitates addressing every aspect of the child's life and environment. The concept of a community school greatly expands traditional notions of the purpose and function of schools in communities, and the role of teachers and school leaders within the school and community, as well as the community's responsibility for student success.

These cases provide feasible alternatives to traditional public schooling strategies that have not proven effective in rural communities and clearly underscore the challenge and opportunity for community schools to address the myriad issues facing rural communities.

Owsley Elementary and Middle School—Booneville, Kentucky

Owsley County Elementary School is located in Booneville, Kentucky, a stone's throw from where Daniel Boone and his party camped in 1780-81. It was called Boone's Station until Owsley County was organized in 1843, at which time it was renamed Booneville and became the county seat. Booneville's estimated population in 2008 was 105, down from 111 in the 2000 census.

Owsley County's population of 4,600 in 2008 is also down 4.6 percent since the 2000 census, and those residents are scattered over 198 square miles of the Eastern Coal Field Region. Almost the entire population (99.2 percent) is white. Fewer than half of adults 25 years old and older have a high school diploma. Median household income in 2007 was \$21,189—52.6 percent of the national median of \$40,299. Owsley ranks by many measures as the second poorest county in the United States with 44.4 percent of its residents in poverty. There are no industries, restaurants, or major highways in Owsley, and the school district is the largest employer.

Owsley County schools serve approximately 900 students in two facilities—Owsley County Elementary School (PK-6) and Owsley County High School (grades 7-12). One Christian school in the county enrolls 8 to 10 students. Owsley Elementary School enrolls about 400 students in Head Start, Early Head Start, and grades PK-6. The district operates two facilities, but it is by all counts a unified PK-12 school system. It is not unreasonable to think of Owsley as a community school system rather than a system with two community schools.

Superintendent Melinda Turner nearly chuckles when asked about school and community connections in Owsley County, saying, “The school is the community.”³² Teachers, administrators, and community members echo this sentiment throughout the district. Nearly every important event in Owsley is held in the schools, including weddings, receptions, theatre performances, and emergency management.

School leadership and unity of vision

Stephen Gebbard taught in the district 20 years before becoming principal of Owsley Elementary School. He is a graduate of Owsley County High School, as are many of the district's teachers. The staff is acutely aware of the deep poverty affecting almost all of their students, but poverty is clearly not viewed as a reason for low expectations of either the students or the educators. In fact, poverty seems to be a motivator of staff commitment and resolve to see students succeed.

When asked how the district attained an obvious unity of vision for the success of its children, Gebbard said, “Folks realized that in order to facilitate education and address the physical, emotional, and social needs of students, you had to work with the entire community. In order to better the children, you have to better society.”³³ This realization can be attributed in large part to the strong, visionary leadership of the school principal, superintendent, and key staff.

Academic programs and innovations

When one enters Owsley Elementary School, there is nothing that reflects the deep and persistent poverty that plagues the community. The exterior wall of the Depression Era WPA-built gymnasium forms the interior, left wall of the warm, inviting entranceway. A safari theme runs throughout the building, creating a welcoming atmosphere for children and adults alike.

School and district leaders have leveraged scarce resources to provide a number of innovative programs, including a Save the Children Literacy Project, an Artist-in-Residence, Gifted and Talented Services, Reading First, and Everyday Mathematics. Superintendent Turner notes, “We apply for grants that others might think are not worth it,” she said, “the \$500 to \$1,000 grants.”

Owsley Elementary School has used a Leonore Annenberg School Fund grant provided through the Rural School and Community Trust to initiate a schoolwide technology program that puts iPods, iPads, and iMacs at the disposal of all students. The school principal, teachers, a parent, and district leaders in a team meeting during the researcher’s site visit to Owsley talked excitedly about how they would use the technology to support student learning at all levels. Teachers, they said, would record mini-lessons and lectures for students who needed extra time and reinforcement. Books would be downloaded to give students access to texts that the school’s budget could not afford. The technology would give students an eye to the world beyond Owsley and strengthen the already strong connections between the school and the community.

The school also offers a wide range of services to students and families in the community. Services are provided largely through the school’s family resource center and the Quality Care for Kids program. A Youth Services Center provides similar services at the high school. It seems no one at Owsley Elementary School complains or thinks twice about going beyond their teaching duties to help children and families succeed.

Family resource center: Parents donated over 2,100 hours of volunteer service to Owsley Elementary School during the 2008-2009 school year, mostly through the family resource center. Teachers log their volunteer needs in the center, and the full-time center coordinator matches volunteers with the listed needs. Volunteering in the school has led a number of parents who dropped out of school to go back

and complete their GEDs and higher-education degrees. Families can come into the center and get clothing, food, counseling, transportation to medical appointments, and even assistance in setting up utility payment plans when needed.

Health services: The family resource center is also the door through which children and families access health services. The district pays about \$5,000 per year per school for a school nurse and does Medicaid billing for students who qualify. The Quality Care for Kids program brings mobile clinics to the school for dental screenings and minor services and for hearing and vision screenings. The local Lion’s Club assists in purchasing eyeglasses when needed. The district participates in the Alliance for a Healthier Generation addressing health and wellness issues among students. The program was expanded recently to include staff and community health workers.

Kentucky Proud: Owsley’s elementary students grow a pizza garden that provides vegetables for the school cafeteria. A Farm to School grant supports a high school gardening project, as well. Produce from the gardens are Kentucky Proud certified and sold in the local farmer’s market.

Parent and community outreach: Owsley leverages its Title I program to strengthen its outreach to parents and the community. Ten monthly workshops a year provide information on health, academics, scholarship opportunities, and a host of other topics. The district’s back-to-school event has become a “huge community event,” drawing attendance from neighboring districts. The event includes a health fair and health screenings. The Labor Day week Community Fair features student exhibits and is attended by more than 1,000 people, over a fourth of the community’s 4,000 residents. Steve Gebbard, the school principal, added, “The school system is the communication center for the community.”

Molly Stark Elementary School—Bennington, Vermont

Bennington is a small rural village in southwestern Vermont surrounded by the Green and Taconic Mountain ranges. It is a short commute from New York City and the Berkshires of Massachusetts. The town’s multiple historic districts, mountain ranges, and covered bridges draw thousands of tourists each year.

The town of Bennington is located in Bennington County. The county’s estimated population of 36,434 is 97.2 percent white. The median household and per capita incomes are on par with the state as a whole, and poverty rates in the county are

slightly lower than in the state as a whole. Molly Stark School is one of seven elementary schools in the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union. It is named after “Molly” Elizabeth Stark, remembered for her support of her husband, General John Stark, and his troops during the American Revolution. Her home functioned as a hospital, and she functioned as a nurse to her husband’s troops during a smallpox epidemic. It is little wonder that the full-service community school that bears her name has a major emphasis on providing health services to children and families who need them.

Like all successful community schools, a key first step for Molly Stark was planning. The school’s principal and staff began in 1995 to consider what they might do differently in response to the negative changes they had seen in student behavior, parent involvement, and teacher morale. They began a series of focus group discussions among the school’s staff, a physician, a psychologist, and a police detective with whom they had worked over time to determine what they might do to help children and families succeed. Perhaps most important among the discussion topics was the question of the school’s beliefs about its role and responsibility in the lives of families and with respect to student success.

Molly Stark’s planning process spanned an entire school year of discussion and data collection. The data were used to determine what programs and services children and families needed, how to provide them, and how to obtain funding to implement and support them. Various data sources, including parent and community surveys, school and community data, and state data were used to identify the most urgent needs.

Most outstanding among the school’s findings was the fact that the district had the highest dropout rate in the state and the second highest teen pregnancy rate. Medicaid-eligible students did not have adequate access to dental services, and students were entering kindergarten unprepared to benefit from the experience. Those needs were then mapped to available resources and new program innovations that would make crucial child and family services accessible and affordable. Having collected and assessed the data, the Molly Stark team affiliated with the Yale Schools of the 21st Century program and began to move forward with its plan.

Programs and services

The result of the Molly Stark planning process is a full-service community school strategically focused on ensuring all students’ success. The school began to imple-

ment its plan in 1996, staggering the initiation of services over several years. Services and programs have evolved in the years since, but are still strategically focused on meeting the multiple needs of its students and the families that care for them.

Family center: Molly Stark’s family center is the portal through which families access key services. The center employs a full-time home-school liaison who provides a “walking bus” through low-income housing areas near the school in the mornings and afternoons. She also focuses on attendance issues and follows up on tardies and early dismissals. Many of the health services provided by or facilitated through the school come under the family center’s umbrella as well.

Health services: Basic health services were among the initial services the school had planned to implement. They would bring on a dental hygienist who would make referrals to local dentists who agreed to treat Medicaid-eligible students. A retired dentist approached the school in 1998—one year into the program—with a proposal to begin an on-site dental practice for Medicaid-eligible students. Health services also include a pediatrician, and audiologist, and a psychologist who make regular visits to the school one or more days each week.

A school nurse provides physical exams and inoculations for students with no primary care physician. The nurse also maintains a health office webpage for parents and students. The site features monthly updates on important health topics, provides health and wellness information, and houses a variety of downloadable health care forms.

Molly Stark had to overcome many obstacles to establish the center. They had to first gain approval of the local school board to establish such a center. This is nearly an insurmountable hurdle in many rural areas where school boards and school leaders have become more focused on narrowing the school curriculum and preparing children to “pass the test.” Molly Stark also was not an eligible applicant for the state grant that provides financial and technical assistance for needs assessment and planning in the areas of housing, economic development, public facilities, and services for low-income residents. The town’s Select Board had to apply for the grant on the school’s behalf. This situation could present clear and conflicting priorities in many rural towns, particularly where the leadership has a narrow vision of schools and does not see a clear connection between schools and broader economic development issues.

Molly Stark was able to overcome the hurdles and bring its family center and health services online. Medicaid covers many of the health services, but there

remains a funding gap that the school has to fill with local resources to cover the time health professionals spend in the schools. This is a major challenge in the current budget crunch and with spiraling health care costs.

Day care, pre-school, and kindergarten: Molly Stark operates an on-site licensed day care center that provides before and after school care beginning at 7:00 a.m. and ending at 5:30 p.m. Being a licensed center means that eligible families can receive child care subsidies and parents can pay for services on a sliding scale. Kindergarten care is available to morning and afternoon students, and integrated preschool services are provided four days a week. Staff members devote the fifth day to home visits. There are also summer and school vacation programs.

Family development: Molly Stark offers a range of other family-strengthening services and programs in addition to health and child care. Parents can enroll in GED classes at the school one evening a week. Child care is available during these sessions, as are playgrounds for parents with infants and small children. The center also provides transportation and scholarships for GED testing.

A Community Leadership Training program offered in conjunction with the Bennington County Child Care Association provides community members with education and experience in citizenship and advocacy for themselves and their children. Unlimited Fathering Opportunities provides dinner and recreational opportunities for fathers and their children ages three to six.

Other family strengthening programs include on-site community college courses taught by Molly Stark staff; adult and family literacy programs; a Family Lending Library with children's books, games, and videos; and a Cooking for Life program developed by the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger and the University of Vermont's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education program. This six-week program encourages parents and caregivers to prepare healthy, affordable meals.

Noble High School—North Berwick, Maine

Noble High School's guiding principle is that, "All students are capable of success; and all students will have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to become self-directed, lifelong learners; flexible workers; complex thinkers and responsible community and global contributors."

Noble High School is part of Maine’s School Administrative District #60, or MSAD 60, which is a rural district in the southwestern county of York. York County was established in 1636 and has a rich fur trading and sawmills history. It is the oldest county in Maine, and one of the oldest in the United States.

An estimated 201,876 people lived in York County in 2009, up 8.1 percent from the 2000 U.S. Census report. Almost all (97 percent) of the county’s residents are white, with Hispanics making up the largest percentage (1.2 percent) of people of color. The county’s median household income in 2008 was \$54,626, which was higher than both the state (\$46,419) and the national (\$52,175) medians. Per capita income was also higher in the county than in the state as a whole, and the percentage of persons living below the poverty level was lower than in the state and nation.³⁴

York County’s economic profile is skewed by the affluence of its most famous town, Kennebunkport. Kennebunkport has become a summer haven for the wealthy, including former President George H. W. Bush. But the three towns served by Noble High School—Berwick, North Berwick, and Lebanon—have different economic profiles. Two of the towns have median household incomes that are below the state median. Fewer than 10 percent of residents in the county live below the poverty level, but 21 percent of the school’s students were eligible for free and reduced meals in 2008-2009.³⁵

Former principal Pam Fisher, speaking of the area surrounding Noble High School, commented, “A day’s drive around our district would certainly convince anyone of the ubiquitous poverty.” The towns have combined populations totaling 12,300 people, and the towns are rural but among the fastest growing areas in the state. There is no public transportation in any of the towns served by Noble High.

Noble’s dilemma and the community’s needs

MSAD 60 serves approximately 3,000 students, about 1,070 of them at Noble High School in grades 9-12. The school and the community were facing a dilemma in 1995. The school had been built nearly 35 years earlier to accommodate 550 students, but its enrollment had grown to 900 and was growing by 50 to 100 students a year. The campus held 14 mobile units and could not accommodate the kinds of programs the school and community wanted for their children. The three towns that the school served were spread over 134 miles and lacking in basic services for both children and adults.

The need for a new school, combined with limited resources and mutual needs across the three towns, brought townspeople and educators together in an intensive one and a half year planning process. Community members from all three towns participated in open forums, met with the principal at dinners and in private homes, and responded to surveys. A planning committee composed of school and community members identified three major goals to be accomplished with the construction of a new school: 1) build a sense of community among the three rural towns served by the school; 2) provide needed community services and lifelong learning opportunities for adults; and 3) create a more personal, project-based interdisciplinary learning environment for students.

Design concepts

The school's design was influenced by the towns' identified needs, the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, of which the school is a member, and the school district's guiding principles. The five design principles were:

- Abolish anonymity by creating small learning environments
- Make spaces to reflect the concept of the teacher as coach, and the student as worker
- Make sure the building supports a curriculum that is collaboratively designed, interdisciplinary, and project based
- Create a school that serves as a community center and embraces community so that community functions are integrated with educational functions
- Create a school that is flexible in design, materials, and function

The result was a new Noble High School where the needs of both school and community are being met, and the lines between them are nearly indistinct. The school's main lobby is a "town square" where students, educators, and community members mingle. Then-Assistant Principal Tom Ledue noted in an interview with Rural Trust staffer Julie Bartsch that, "The design of our facility welcomes community members as well as our students. Parents that may not have particularly enjoyed their own high school experience have to notice a different feel to this school as soon as they walk through the front doors, one that is far more inviting than the one they remember."

Part of that welcome feel comes from the pictures and displays on the town square that are dedicated to and maintained by the three towns. The cases display local information, news, and histories of the towns. Streets lead from the town square

to “educational neighborhoods” containing various learning communities, Head Start, a health center, a 50-seat student-run restaurant, a 1,000-seat performing arts center, and a cafeteria, all of which are used by both school and community groups.

Programs and services

Noble High School offers a rich and broad curriculum. Students must earn 24.5 credit hours to graduate, including five English, five math, four science, and one fine arts credits. The school has three academies, each consisting of heterogeneous groups of students in grades 9 through 12. All students must complete a common curriculum. Students must build portfolios connecting their work to Maine’s Learning Results and do a project-based presentation. Other learning opportunities are provided through participation on the Civil Rights Team, on the school board, and in a wide variety of school clubs.

Comprehensive health services: A partnership with the York County Hospital provides Noble with a nurse practitioner during school hours. The school-based health center sees about 100 to 150 students a month. The nurse practitioner and school nurses triage services with the hospital and local physicians. Services were initially provided at no cost to students and their families, but increased staff, maintenance, and utilities costs have led to charges for some services. Student services include diagnosis and treatment of acute illness and injury; management of chronic ailments, including asthma and diabetes; routine hearing, visual, and dental screenings; prescription services; laboratory testing; sports examinations; and mental health services.

Early childhood programs: Noble houses two early childhood programs: Head Start and Early Childhood. Children come from eight surrounding towns and attend at no cost. The programs provide internships and work-study opportunities for high school students enrolled in the school’s early childhood education program.

Performing arts center: Noble’s 1,000-seat performing arts center was funded in part through a referendum passed by the three towns. The center houses a theatre, an auditorium, and a small lecture hall. A group of community members serves as the center’s advisory board. The center is available for many functions at no cost to the community, but rental and admissions fees have made it financially self-sustaining.

Culinary arts: Noble houses the Stanford Vocational Culinary Arts Program, which shares space with the school kitchen. Students in the two-year program operate a 50-person restaurant that is open during school hours and accessible from the town square. The restaurant, like the town square, is a gathering place for students, teachers, and community members.

Community service: Noble's students must complete 60 hours of community service. Service opportunities are posted on the school's website. The community service program reflects the school's commitment "to its students to heighten their sense of global responsibility, their sensitivity to social problems, ... and a sense of personal fulfillment through their commitment and caring for others."³⁶

Adult education: The Adult Continuing Education Center offers on-site and online classes and teleconferences for students and community members. Noble's students provide full-day child care for parents enrolled in the program.

Common elements across community schools

The Alliance for Excellent Education lists 10 key elements that every rural high school needs to have in place to ensure its students' success.³⁷ These key elements closely align with the Rural School and Community Trust's Principles and Standards for Good High Schools and are just as essential for elementary schools as they are for high schools. These elements and principles are all evident to varying degrees in each of the community school models presented above.

These elements and principles become more than buzz words and phrases when overlaid by the earlier discussion of "community." They indeed become what guides and frames community efforts to ensure the success of their children. As Owsley's superintendent Melinda Turner would put it, "It's really about knowing our kids, identifying their needs, and arranging the services they need." That's what full-service community schools do.

Alliance for Education key elements

1. College and work-ready curriculum for all children
2. Personal attention for all students
3. Extra help for those who need it
4. Bringing the real world to the classroom
5. Family and community involvement
6. A safe learning environment
7. Skilled teachers
8. Strong leaders
9. Necessary resources
10. User-friendly information for parents and the community

Rural Trust principles and standards for good high schools³⁸

1. Rigorous, authentic, and expansive content and strategies that engage every student in a personalized learning environment
2. Multileveled school and community connections and collaboration to make the school and community good places to live, work, learn, and play
3. Modeling of democratic values
4. Policies, calendars, and resources arranged to maximize community involvement
5. Adequate, competent, and caring staff aligned to meet stated goals
6. Clean, safe, orderly, and well-equipped facilities that support rigorous academic goals and co-curricular activities
7. Competent, knowledgeable, and supportive leadership

Challenges and solutions to implementing rural community schools

Co-location and integration of services is an obvious benefit in community schools, but there are many barriers that make it most often the exception rather than the rule in rural America. Some of the barriers are the result of local policy and practice; others stem from state and federal policy. But communities can overcome these barriers and build support for eliminating them into policy and practice at all levels. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the federal Full-Service Community Schools Program, the School Improvement Grant Program, and other competitive grants programs all present such opportunities at the federal level.

The following are some of the barriers to implementing full-service community schools in rural communities and some recommendations for actions that local, state, and federal government can take to overcome them.

Challenge: Attracting highly effective teachers

Rural schools, like all other schools, want highly effective teachers in every classroom. The inability to attract and retain teachers often leaves rural classrooms with teachers who are not equipped to teach the subjects they are assigned, who are not prepared to teach and live in rural settings, or who are for other reasons ineffective in the rural classroom.

Community schools can help to improve teaching quality by bringing community-based expertise and indigenous knowledge into the teaching and learning experience. Permitting districts to implement community educator certification programs will allow for the placement of highly skilled and knowledgeable community members in classrooms under the supervision of highly qualified-highly effective teachers of record. This type of program can facilitate the movement of parent and community volunteers into the teaching profession in understaffed areas.

East Feliciana, Louisiana, employed such a strategy under a former superintendent several years ago. This strategy can be coupled with one or more of the “grow your own” teacher recruitment and retention strategies being employed by states and local education agencies around the country. The North Carolina Model Teacher Education Consortium is one example of such a program.

The Model Teacher Education Consortium is a partnership comprised of nearly half of the state’s public school systems, 35 community colleges, 21 universities, the state department of public education, and Regional Alternative Licensing Centers. The North Carolina General Assembly established the consortium in 1989 to alleviate chronic teacher shortages in certain parts of the state. It offers counseling, professional development, and financial assistance to employees of partnering school districts to pursue initial licensure or a first degree in teacher education, or to clear a lateral entry or provisional license. The consortium also offers Praxis I and Praxis II seminars and stipends for teacher assistants and other paraprofessionals who are required to take a leave-of-absence while fulfilling teaching internship requirements.

Challenge: Encouraging parental and community engagement

Parental and community engagement is essential to the success of a community school. Yet school policies and practices often inhibit involvement beyond a superficial level—attendance at parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, and athletic events or festivals.

Local and state school boards and state legislatures should review policies and practices that might present obstacles to substantive parental and community engagement and remove those that inhibit engagement such as criminal record bans for certain types of nonviolent crimes.

Schools and school districts should partner with community-based and faith-based organizations and agencies to provide multiple opportunities and varied venues for parents and community members to become involved in decision making and interact with children in academic, social, and cultural contexts.

Challenge: Making better use of facilities

A majority of school facilities in the United States stand idle for many hours each week. Many are empty and unused for the entire summer and other school breaks. Local government entities at the same time struggle to build and maintain facilities to house the services that children and families need to address those out-of-school factors that affect learning.

The notion that school facilities belong to the school rather than to the community puts an unnecessary strain on local economies to maintain related services in individual silos. Joint facility use is further complicated by the existence of categorical funding sources that often carry eligibility criteria, construction standards, or other regulatory requirements that are inconsistent or in conflict with each other. State laws in some instances prohibit the use of state funds to construct regular public schools on land that is not owned by the school district.

Local governments should consider co-locating schools and services for children before deciding to build new structures or otherwise providing separate housing for schools and service agencies. This can be especially beneficial as rural communities try to attract young health care providers who might wish to set up a private practice but are unable to afford the related costs.

Facility planning for any publicly funded construction should be preceded by a comprehensive needs assessment that includes all stakeholder groups—similar to strategic planning process seen in the Noble High School model. States should harmonize categorical construction standards when doing so does not compromise the public purpose served by the standards.

Challenge: Negotiating agreements and reducing risks among partners

The duration of commitment and exit strategies for joint facility users may vary among partners. No one wants to be left carrying the financial weight of the joint-use facility if one or more of the partners are less stable or subject to involuntary relocation or consolidation to other sites. This challenge becomes most important when districts are considering new school construction that incorporates unique spaces for child and family services.

Local and state governmental entities can minimize the financial risk to community school partners by devising a formula for allocating space costs or construction costs to multiple service providers and their separate funding sources. State legislatures should create a Rural Joint Use Public Facilities Commission to identify statutory and administrative barriers to joint-use facilities and recommend policy changes specific to their respective states. They should capitalize and administer a joint-use guarantee fund that insures against the loss of fiscal capacity to meet bond payments if a partner is forced to abandon the joint-use facilities before the partners fulfill the terms of the financing due to state or local government action. These new joint-use facility financing plans should replace existing state or federal facilities financing plans.

Challenge: Establishing community support and consensus

Community schools respond to the multiple needs of children. Knowing the needs and aligning resources to address them requires communities to have a vision and find common ground around community, youth, family, and school needs and plan to address those needs successfully. Many communities are unable to engage in such a process without the help of an intermediary. Yet it is difficult to obtain funding for such endeavors. State legislatures should provide funding to support strategic planning processes for community school development and implementation in rural places.

Challenge: Making federal turnaround models relevant for rural schools

The school turnaround models being espoused by the U.S. Department of Education are not feasible in many rural settings. Rural students quite often do not have the option to relocate to other schools close to home, and districts do not have the option to replace teachers and leaders and hire new ones.

Congress and state legislatures should provide incentives for and place special emphasis on the development and implementation of community schools as a turnaround strategy for high-needs, Title I, and other low-performing schools. This strategy should be explicitly stated among the strategies that now appear in multiple federal competitive grant guidelines and incorporated in the reauthorization of Title I. Federal competitive grant applicants should be awarded extra points for their intention in this regard.

Challenge: Bolstering federal funding for community schools

The Full Service Community Schools Grant Program does not carry enough weight to leverage significant state and local policy changes at its current appropriation level of \$10 million in fiscal year 2010. It also does not offer enough funding per applicant to address some of the identified issues. Because these are competitive grants aimed at the local district rather than the state level, smaller districts with fewer human resources and capacity likely will not fare well in this and similar competitions.

The federal government should therefore increase funding for the Full Service Community Schools Program, and the Department of Education should give technical assistance to rural districts through intermediary groups and organizations to help level the field in this and other competitive grant competitions.

Conclusion

Rural schools enroll more than 10 million of our nation's children. The rural places where these children live are economically, culturally, and religiously diverse, as are the students themselves. This diversity in place and people makes it unlikely that a single community school model will work in all rural settings. This is, perhaps, the most important lesson to be drawn from the three cases presented here.

The word “community” in full-service community schools implies more than those services or activities that normally happen outside of the school setting. It implies a uniqueness about place and the people who live there. Each place has a unique history, culture, economy, and ecology. Each has a unique set of relationships, power structures, challenges, and opportunities. We must therefore plan each community school taking into account its individual surroundings and circumstances.

Successful community schools do not come about merely by co-locating services. Planning a successful community school is an intensive process that involves multiple stakeholders, as was the case with the construction of a new Noble High School. Planning is just as essential and intensive when new construction is not in the picture, as was the case with Molly Stark and Owsley elementary schools.

Transformational change in the delivery of public education requires not just a narrow focus on education, but also a keen focus, intentionality, and broad-based collaboration around addressing the needs of children and families. It requires broad-based consensus building and merging of institutional and organizational cultures. An intermediary that is not vested in local politics is in many cases best suited to facilitate this kind of planning. Funding for strategic community school planning is a worthwhile investment of public dollars.

The result of planning that takes into account the uniqueness of place and people is that each community school offers curricular, co-curricular, and family and community services that are specific to the needs of the community it serves. They reflect both what the state requires and what local people want for their

children and community—a 1,000-seat performing arts center and a foreign student exchange program at Noble; comprehensive health services and a community leadership training program at Molly Stark; and Kentucky Proud vegetable gardens and assistance with family members' transportation to medical appointments at Owsley, for example.

Community schools are in many ways a natural phenomenon in highly stressed rural communities such as Owsley County. The school is the greatest resource in the community, the largest employer, and custodian of the largest public facilities. Leadership plays a crucial role in developing a common vision and high expectations for what is possible, notwithstanding circumstance. The kind of leadership that principals and superintendents in the case studies exhibit seems more often to be the exception than the rule. There are strong implications here for university-based school leadership programs. These programs should embrace the community school concept and immediately begin to integrate preparation for leadership in community schools into their curricula and internships for aspiring rural school leaders.

State education agencies also should embrace and promote the community school concept in rural communities, both as an alternative to consolidation and as a school turnaround strategy. Assistance teams assigned to struggling schools should be well versed in the community school concept and able to facilitate a community school planning process in targeted schools.

This study focuses primarily on the benefits of community schools in highly stressed rural communities. Yet many of the highlighted characteristics of community schools can be applied in traditional school settings with little to no cost. School boards can remove policies that inhibit parent and community engagement. Schools can partner with community colleges to provide educational services that bring adults into the school building such as adult literacy, English as a second language, college courses, and career and technical certification programs. School districts can partner with recreation departments, arts councils, historic societies, and other community resources to make facilities available to students and community members beyond normal school hours. State departments can convene discussions with other state agencies to remove barriers to joint-use facilities and make the regulations around facility construction and use more uniform.

State and federal policies and grant programs can be powerful enablers for the spread of rural community schools. Our current economic crisis and the concurrent crisis in public education provide the challenge, opportunity, and necessity to consider the community school concept more seriously and implement it more broadly.

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Williams co-founded and directed the North Carolina Center for the Study of Black History and was a founder of a 100,000 watt public radio station, WVSP FM. She has served as a consultant for the numerous state, national, and international educational and community development organizations. She served 12 years on the Warren County, NC, Board of Education, five as chairperson, and currently serves on several organizational boards. She holds Ed.D. and M.Ed. degrees from North Carolina State University and an AB degree from Duke University.

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