



REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

Family and Community Engagement, Rural
February 2020

Question:

What literature exists related to the role of rural schools in community development?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about the role of rural schools in community development. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on the role of rural schools in community development. We focused on identifying resources that specifically addressed the role of rural schools on community viability and well-being, participation, and collaboration. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

References

Casto, H. C. (2016). "Just one more thing I have to do": School-community partnerships. *School Community Journal*, 26(1), 139–162. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1104400>

From the abstract: "School-community partnering activities promote the education of children, the well-being of families, and the vitality of communities. This study explores the connections that exist and are desired between a small, rural elementary school and its local community. Interviews ($n = 21$) with district and school administration, teachers, parents,

and community members revealed that partnerships exist to create afterschool and summer activities for children as well as to promote literacy and ease the transition to middle school. The primary obstacle is organization, including the time and resources to create and maintain partnerships. Geographic isolation affects volunteer activity in the school. Community connections are considered as horizontal (local) and vertical (school district) ties for the school. Place-based education is described as a form of partnering that could enhance the educational experience of students while simultaneously creating horizontal ties for the school and its community.”

Garza, H., & Eller, R. D. (1998). The role of rural community colleges in expanding access and economic development. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 103, 31–41. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ577986>.

From the abstract: “Explores ways that rural community colleges can develop collaborations and relationships that foster educational access and economic development. Discusses the Rural Community College Initiative, a program that assists colleges in the United States' most distressed rural areas in designing locally effective educational practices.”

Gibbs, R. M. (2005, November). Education as a rural development strategy. *Amber Waves*, 3(5), 20–25. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2005/november/education-as-a-rural-development-strategy/>

From the brief: “Educational attainment in rural America reached a historic high in 2000, with nearly one in six rural adults holding a 4-year college degree, and more than three in four completing high school. As the demand for workers with higher educational qualifications rises, many rural policymakers have come to view local educational levels as a critical determinant of job and income growth in their communities. Attracting employers who provide higher skill jobs and encouraging educational gains are seen as complementary components of a high-skill, high-wage development strategy.”

Gross, J. M. S., Haines, S. J., Hill, C., Francis, G. L., Blue-Banning, M., & Turnbull, A. P. (2015). Strong school-community partnerships in inclusive schools are “part of the fabric of the school...We count on them.” *School Community Journal*, 25(2), 9–34. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1085646>

From the abstract: “School-community partnerships play an essential role in successful schools, often providing supports and resources to meet staff, family, and student needs that go beyond what is typically available through school. Reciprocally, community partners benefit from their relationships with schools, including learning about schools’ inclusive culture. To better understand strong community partnerships and what fosters their development, we conducted focus groups with community partners of five schools. The first main finding presented in this article is that these schools have a variety of partners and partnerships, but all partnerships are reciprocal in that they are mutually beneficial. The second set of findings presented include the school factors that were facilitators of successful school-community partnerships: strong school leadership, an inviting school

culture, educator commitment to student success, and the ability to collaborate and communicate with community partners. The community partners in many of these schools emphasized how the culture of including all students and providing all students with an excellent education profoundly influenced how they perceived disability and how they used their new knowledge in other settings. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.”

Harmon, H. L., & Schafft, K. (2009). Rural school leadership for collaborative community development. *The Rural Educator*, 30(3), 4–9. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ869309>

From the abstract: “In this article we address the role of rural schools in community development. We first discuss the largely historical linkages between rural schools and the communities they serve, and what this means for both school and community well-being. We then consider the newly revised standards for preparing school administrators, developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, and how these standards may align with community-building efforts. In sum, we argue that enlightened educational leadership that seriously takes into account the 21st Century needs of students—as well as the communities in which they reside—cannot help but interpret academic and community improvement goals as mutually reinforcing priorities.”

Lyson, T. A. (2002). What does a school mean to a community? Assessing the social and economic benefits of schools to rural villages in New York. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 17(3), 131–137. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ661668>; full text available at http://jrre.vmhost.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/17-3_1.pdf

From the abstract: “A study identified community-level characteristics associated with the presence or absence of a school. Data from the 1990 Census and the New York Department of Education identified 64 villages in New York with populations of 500 or less, 36 of which had schools, and 233 villages with populations of 501–2,500, 192 of which had schools. Results indicate that for the smallest rural communities, the presence of a school was associated with many social and economic benefits. Housing values were considerably higher in small villages with schools, and municipal infrastructure was more developed. Occupational structure differed qualitatively, in that places with schools had more people employed in more favorable occupational categories and more employment in civic occupations. While average household income was not markedly different across places with and without schools, income inequality and welfare dependence was lower in villages with schools. Although differences between places with and without schools were not as dramatic in larger rural communities, larger rural communities with schools ranked higher than communities without schools on virtually every indicator of social and economic well-being. This study shows that schools serve as important markers of social and economic viability and vitality, and that the money that might be saved through school consolidation could be forfeited in lost taxes, declining property values, and lost business.”

Miller, B. (1995). The role of rural school in community development: Policy issues and implication. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 11(3), 163–172. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED393617>

From the abstract: This report explores issues related to expanding the roles of schools and youth in rural community development. It is suggested that rural schools, when working in partnership with local leaders and residents, can have a positive impact on community viability. The report is based on a project involving a partnership between a local school system and a rural Midwest community, and a second project implementing school-to-work transition in an isolated rural Midwest community. Research suggests that if community development efforts are to be successful, they must build social capital, and this requires developing strong linkages between the community and the school. Approaches for building school-community linkages include establishing the school as a community center that serves as both a resource for community learning and the center for the delivery of community services; integrating the community into the curriculum; and developing school-based enterprises that allow students to develop entrepreneurial skills while meeting a service need in their communities. Sustaining community-based programs requires strong support from community organizations, groups, individuals, and leaders. The report describes how three rural communities in the Midwest implemented policies that contributed to the success and survival of their community-based programs. Strategies for developing effective policy support include capitalizing on the effectiveness of youth as advocates and policymakers, building coalitions, being patient and persistent, educating public officials, using the budgeting process as a policy tool, covering all bases, and obtaining solid information and data about why the program should be granted policy status.

Petrin, R. A., Schafft, K. A., & Meece, J. L. (2014). Educational sorting and residential aspirations among rural high school students: What are the contributions of schools and educators to rural brain drain? *American Educational Research Journal*, 51, 294–326. Abstract retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1021959>

From the abstract: “An extended body of research has documented the outmigration of the ‘best and brightest’ youth from rural areas. Some of this scholarship has suggested that rural schools and educators may be complicit in this process as they devote extra attention and resources to the highest achieving students—those most likely to leave their rural communities after high school. Using data from a national multimethod study, we find mixed support for this hypothesis. To the contrary, our data suggest that the highest-achieving rural students are among those with the greatest community attachment, and that student perceptions of local economic conditions are far more influential in shaping postsecondary residential aspirations than the advice of educators, or the poverty level of the school.”

Preston, J. P., & Barnes, K. E. R. (2017). Successful leadership in rural schools: Cultivating collaboration. *Rural Educator*, 38(1), 6–15. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1225156>

From the abstract: “This article is a literature review of the professional competencies and personal qualities commonly associated with successful leadership in rural schools. Multiple

definitions of the term rural are provided. A limitation of this research is that findings reflect literature published from 2005–2015, positioning this document as a current analysis of rural leadership. A limitation of the article is that the research predominantly emanates from rural American, Canadian, and Australian settings, restricting a global application of results. The findings are represented via two overarching themes. Successful rural principals promote people-focused relationships with staff, students, parents, and community members. Second, rural principals have the opportunity to be agents of change through balancing local and district policies and through enacting instructional leadership. At the root, both of these themes reveal the importance of rich collaboration with members of the school community. This research is pertinent to researchers, government leaders, policymakers, school leaders, teachers, parents, and community members interested in understanding and responding to the demands of rural schools.”

Additional Ask A REL Responses to Consult

Ask A REL Appalachia at SRI International. (2019). *What does the research say about implementation and best practices for regional or district collaboration for the delivery of educational services to students?* Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/appalachia/askarel/aar67.asp>

Additional Organizations to Consult

National Rural Education Association (NREA): <http://www.nrea.net/Home>

From the website: “The NREA was originally founded as the Department of Rural Education in 1907. It is the oldest established national organization of its kind in the United States. Through the years it has evolved as a strong and respected organization of rural school administrators, teachers, board members, regional service agency personnel, researchers, business and industry representatives, and others interested in maintaining the vitality of rural school systems across the country.”

- Vibrant Rurality and the Role of Education:

https://www.nrea.net/Blog_Post?blogid=406610

From the NREA blog: “I am struck by how often the expression preserving the rural 'way of life' still remains a central point of contention when it comes to defining rurality and whether or not vibrant education, economic development, and workforce policies should be elements of that definition. To be clear, preservation and vibrancy are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are necessary, connected companions in the long-term health and vitality of any rural community. Yet for a community's K–12 school district, questions often remain as to what really should be the role of education in defining, pursuing, and achieving this. Is its role simply to provide community residents with a compulsory education leading to a high school degree, void of any purposeful connection to the community's economic and workforce needs, or is it to serve as a primary driver in the community's attainment of its long-term economic and workforce goals? I contend that it is the latter.”

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- Rural AND school AND (“community development” OR “economic development” OR “local development” OR “community identity” OR “community well-being” OR “community collaboration” OR “community participation” OR “community viability”)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover information available within the last ten years, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Reference sources: IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols receive highest priority. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on February 20, 2020. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask A REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.