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Rural Roots

News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust

Achieving Academic Goals Through Place-Based Learning

Students in Five States Show How to Do It

By Elaina Loveland

America's educational establishment is preoccupied with test scores and the No Child Left Behind Act, with its new testing requirements and sanctions, is just the latest pressure on teachers and their students to achieve—or else. For many teachers, the response will be to “teach to the test,” drilling their students to learn just the things they need to perform well.

It doesn't have to be that way. Ask the teachers and students who embrace “place-based” education. These educators and young learners know that when learning is rooted in real issues and needs, students can become both academic achievers and good citizens. They can meet the most rigorous academic standards while also helping to improve their communities and solve real-life problems. In this article, we profile five programs where place-based learning is helping to foster academic achievement.

“Student achievement is largely connected to what students learn about

where they are living,” says Ray Barnhardt, the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative co-director and professor/director of Center for Cross-Cultural Studies at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Barnhardt, who is also on the board of trustees of the Rural School and Community Trust, says that “place-based education, done properly, is one way of achieving the goals of accountability.”

Since its inception in 1995, AKRSI has been involved in documenting student achievement in its place-based education efforts. The organization was first started with funds from the National

Science Foundation that required AKRSI to document how innovations in science curricula were improving students' academic achievement. Funding from the Annenberg Rural Challenge also mandated documentation of student progress.

During the past five years, AKRSI has made great strides in proving that place-based education works. The organization has collaborated with 20 of the 48 rural school districts in Alaska to implement initiatives that enhance their mission: “to



Students in Tillamook, Oregon, conduct a snag survey.

TILLAMOOK JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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RuralDatebook

March 20–22, 2003

American Council on Rural Special Education 23rd Annual National Conference

Sheraton City Centre Hotel,
Salt Lake City, Utah

“Rural Survival” is this year’s theme of the American Council on Rural Special Education’s 23rd Annual National Conference. The conference will highlight teaching strategies and programs that have been used successfully in K–12 classrooms. Please visit <http://www.extension.usu.edu/acres> to learn more. Contact Dr. Jack Mayhew at (801) 626-6268 or by e-mail at jmayhew@weber.edu for additional information.

March 28–30, 2003

26th Annual Appalachian Studies Conference

Richmond, Kentucky

Berea College and Eastern Kentucky University will co-host the 26th Annual Appalachian Studies Conference in Kentucky this March. This year’s theme is “Building A Healthy Region: Environment, Culture, Community.” The Appalachian Studies Association brings together scholars, teachers, community and regional activists, entrepreneurs, planners, officials, families, young people, old people—people who care passionately about the region, who want to learn from each other, and who want to make a difference in their communities. Conference information is online at <http://www.appalachianstudies.org>. For questions, call Gordon McKinney at (859) 985-3141 or send an e-mail to gordon_mckinney@berea.edu.

To list your upcoming events in the April 2003 newsletter, please contact Rural Roots at editor@ruraledu.org or call (202) 955-7177, ext. 14.

April 14–15, 2003

Promoting the Economic and Social Vitality of Rural America: The Role of Education

Sheraton New Orleans Hotel,
New Orleans, Louisiana

Note: This is the new date for a meeting originally scheduled for February 12–14, 2003.

This workshop, sponsored by the Economic Research Service, Southern Rural Development Center, and the Rural School and Community Trust, aims to stimulate a focused attention on rural education-related issues in America, particularly the capacity of rural schools to provide high quality education to their students and to serve as an engine for local economic development activities. Details about the workshop are available at <http://srdc.msstate.edu/ruraled/index.html>. Please e-mail Bo Beaulieu at ljb@srdc.msstate.edu if you have questions.

April 23–26, 2003

14th Annual National Service-Learning Conference

Minneapolis Convention Center,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

This year’s National Service-Learning Conference, “Weaving the Fabric of Community: A Celebration of Service-Learning,” will explore how service-learning helps create a cultural commons—a way for diverse peoples to unite around shared community and generational issues. Some featured speakers include Steven A. Culbertson, chief executive officer of Youth Service America; Winona LaDuke, writer and lecturer from the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota; Jack Fortin, executive director of the Center for Lifelong Learning at Luther Seminary; Jim Kielsmeier, founder and president/CEO of the National Youth

Feedback

Do you have any questions, comments or feedback? Something got you jazzed up? Think we should cover your story? Have an idea for us? Have a rural education need that we are not fulfilling? We greatly value your thoughts and opinions. Write to the Editor at the Rural School and Community Trust: 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006. Or e-mail: editor@ruraledu.org. We look forward to hearing from you.



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Rural Roots is published six times per year by the Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust). The Rural Trust is the premier national nonprofit organization addressing the crucial relationship between good schools and thriving rural communities. Working in some of the poorest, most challenging rural places, the Rural Trust involves young people in learning linked to their communities, improves the quality of teaching and school leadership, advocates for appropriate state educational policies, and addresses the critical issue of funding for rural schools.

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An Interview with Barbara Cervone

The Value of Listening to Youth Voices



Barbara Cervone

Barbara Cervone is the founder of What Kids Can Do, a nonprofit organization based in Providence, Rhode Island that is striving to increase the role of youth in school improvement and in local communities by encouraging the public to listen to youth voices and take note of their accomplishments. She was interviewed by Rural Roots editor Elaina Loveland.

What is your background? How did you get involved in promoting youth?

I have been involved in school reform since the 1970s. I started some alternative high schools and from 1994 to 2000, I directed the Annenberg Challenges at Brown University. In 2001, journalist Kathleen Cushman and I founded What Kids Can Do (WKCD).

Tell me about What Kids Can Do.

WKCD is a nonprofit organization based in Providence, Rhode Island and we promote valuing youth as resources to schools and communities. We research good work that young people, working together and guided by adults, are doing and present our findings publicly. Our organization uses print and broadcast media, the Internet and other publication formats to reach a broad audience including students, teachers, parents, youth advocates, journalists, funders, researchers, employers and policymakers about youth work. WKCD shares feature stories, student work and voices, research and resources that expand current views of student achievement. We deeply believe in the contributions of youth as citizens and reflect this belief in all we produce.

What led you to establish What Kids Can Do?

As I already mentioned, Kathleen Cushman and I started WKCD in 2001.

We noticed that youth voices were often not seen as a valuable part of the process in the effort to improve schools. We wanted to bring more positive attention to a different style of learning. The Rural Trust embodies the ideas we value. So much in education has been reduced to a simple equation of test scores and it is more than that—and in improving learning, youth voices matter. We are trying to get this message out to the general public. In a way, we are sort of a newspaper or magazine; we try to get the latest news about youth out very quickly.

Since founding What Kids Can Do, what are you most proud of? What are your greatest accomplishments?

Hopefully, WKCD has played a small part in creating an interest in and bringing more attention to youth voices. We have a broad audience of young people, parents, superintendents and magazines. Probably one of our greatest successes has been obtaining a lot of media attention. Within six months of starting WKCD, media outlets such as *People*, *Worth*, *Nickelodeon*, *Utne Reader*, *Education Week*, PBS and ABC-TV in Boston and others have profiled our work or used our resources for research in writing their own stories.

What are the trends in attitudes toward youth?

There has been an increased interest in the past year about youth voices. And in the past couple of years, there has been a big shift in listening to youth. Funders and educators who used to only think of kids learning inside the school are starting to change their ideas. The contribution of youth development to improve schools has suddenly gotten notice, which hasn't happened in the past.

How do you find stories about youth doing good work?

WKCD finds stories about youth in many different ways. Professional networks and word of mouth provide a lot of leads. Our staff goes through newspapers and magazines frequently in preparation of "Kids on the Wire," which is our listing of youth in the news. More and more, people are bringing this to us.

How does youth input enhance student learning?

In a lot of educational settings, teachers and students are seen as adversaries. But in listening to what youths have to say, they can start to see each other as allies. This attitude of youths and teachers working together can help transform classrooms.

How does listening to youth voices benefit society at large?

Young people have so much to offer. They have enthusiasm, energy, ideas, honesty, and a willingness to approach new things. They are more forgiving than adults and they present things in a fresh, unvarnished way. Because of these assets, their voices should be part of adult conversations. People are starting to take notice of this. We've been approached by a publisher, New Press, to write a book with youth called *Fires in the Bathroom*, which is a guidebook for new teachers with advice from students that will be published in April. This is one example of how youth voices can help others.

What advice would you give to others who want to get involved in promoting youth voices?

Most importantly, create a space for students to share their voices. Many don't go far enough—they might include one youth quote or none. Have the confidence that young people can do the right thing and give them the same courtesy and respect as adults. Honor student voices...listen hard. Truly, listening to youth voices is all about being in partnerships—building partnerships between youth, adults and teachers.

For more information visit the WKCD Web site at <http://www.whatkidscando.org>

First Person

Returning Soul to a Community

By Phillip H. Virden

In rural school districts throughout the United States, the issues of consolidation and declining enrollment are all too commonplace. In the case of consolidation, students are usually transported to a school in another school district. As a result, in such events as an extracurricular activity, townspeople will have to travel out of town for a home basketball game or band performance because “home” has been moved down the road.

In the case of declining enrollment, it can also mean declining revenue for a school district. Thus, a school district can face the unpleasant task of having to reduce staff and programs for its students.

In a rural town, the students and school are the very soul and heart of the community. In the above scenarios of consolidation and declining enrollment, that soul and heart may be lost. And in extreme cases where a town is also battling hard economic times, it can also mean that a community is on the brink of becoming a ghost town.

Fortunately, this story is not about the death of a town or a school; instead, it is a story about listening to people, recognizing change, establishing a vision, and having perseverance in order to rise above a problem.

In the San Juan Mountains of Colorado, there are a number of small towns that were born out of the gold and silver mining boom of the late nineteenth century. One of these towns is Lake City, Colorado. In the 1880s, this mountain community was bustling with a few thousand citizens and there was even talk about the area becoming the capital of the state. Today, Lake City is a quiet summer mountain resort with a year round population of just a few hundred people.

Since its inception, Lake City has always managed to have an elementary school building. However, in the 1960s, the economy and population were in decline. At that time, the school board of



Lake City's new school.

Hinsdale County knew it could no longer provide a quality high school program and consequently, the board made the decision (before the state did) to bus its high school students to Gunnison, Colorado (Gunnison is about 60 miles north of Lake City and is about a 2½ to 3 hour school bus ride). By 1977, the school board acted to transport its seventh and eighth grade students to Gunnison as well.

As in most cases, people usually adapt to any kind of change—even if it means transporting your middle school and high school students on a lengthy daily bus ride over mountain roads; even if it means having students in extracurricular activities leaving their homes by 6 a.m. and, at times, not getting back home until 9 p.m.; and even if it means having your upper grade students leaving home in the dark and coming home in the dark from October through March.

Unfortunately, when a community doesn't even see its students during the week; when it doesn't hear the crowd

cheering its high school team in the hometown gym; when it doesn't enjoy its students performing in musical events, a community begins to lose a huge part of itself—its youth—its very soul. Nevertheless, Lake City seemed resigned to accepting that transporting its teenage students away to another town was the way it had to be.

Then, in the 1990s, some things started happening. The use of computers began to change education. Also, many families didn't want their children placed on a long bus ride. As a result, the school district started exploring the

idea of providing some type of alternative middle school and high school education for its students in Lake City.

One of the first things to happen was having two local high school students take on-line courses from the school district in Monte Vista, Colorado. Although Monte Vista was nearly three hours from Lake City, the two students were soon taking courses from their own homes.

After this breakthrough, other events started happening quickly. Other families expressed interest in having their students take courses via computers. The school district made technology a top priority goal and more computers were purchased and staff computer training was increased. Soon, there were enough middle school and high school students interested that the district purchased a mobile building for a middle school and rented a small house in town to use as a high school.

Although Lake City had never passed a school bond issue, the Hinsdale

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Youth Council

Land Summit Unites Minority Youth

From the Rural School and Community Trust National Youth Council

For the past two years, Saaneah Mjumbe, a member of the Rural Trust's National Youth Council and a junior at Livingstone High School in Sumpter County, Alabama, has participated in the Youth Land Summit. This innovative program brings together rural youth to exchange ideas on minority land issues from the African-American, Hispanic, and Native American perspectives.

Each summer since 2001, Mjumbe and a group of more than 40 young people ages 15–23 have spent a week in each other's communities, learning about land and race issues from the respective native culture at the Youth Land Summit. The first year's summit was held at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives' farm in Epes, Alabama, and focused on the struggle of Black Belt communities to retain their farms and land. This past summer's gathering took place on the Paiute Nation Reservation on Pyramid Lake, Nevada. A rural Hispanic community in New Mexico will host the summit in 2003.

"One of the most exciting experiences at the last Youth Land Summit was living in a tepee, participating in a "Sweat," and seeing how much young Native American students value their land," says Mjumbe. "There is a natural connection between our cultures. We spend a lot of time talking about the cultural stereotypes and what we can do to reverse them."

The week includes workshops, speakers, hands-on-training, intensive dialogue and debates as the 45 students are exposed to the major land struggles facing Native American and other minority communities throughout the country. Participants are challenged to think about what they, as young people, can do now about land control issues, and what they can prepare themselves for in

the future. Dialogues and training workshops focus on topics such as cooperative community development, sustainable agriculture, conflict resolution, land loss and retention, and environmental justice and reparations.

The goal of the Youth Land Summit is to connect the three cultures organizationally and politically using the issues around land as a common lens to look at loss, culture and tradition. Organizers hope to reverse the alarming rate of land loss among minority populations and work with community-based organizations to develop alternative enterprises that will permit minority owners to keep their land. The sponsoring organizations believe that young people are key resources in expanding land ownership and economic opportunities for people of color in rural communities.

Mjumbe's father, Lukata Mjumbe, director of the Rural Training and Research Center at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, was surprised by "how little each group knows about the others in respect to land issues, culture and tradition and how much more we need

to know before we can work together." Small interventions—like preparing materials and workshop activities in multiple languages and having an interpreter—are helping to build collegiality among the groups.

Saaneah Mjumbe was proud to participate in Youth Land Summit because interest in land related issues comes naturally to her from living with her family on a farm in Epes, Alabama. Participating in the Youth Land Summit also increased her understanding and admiration for her father's work.

Organizers of the Youth Land Summit hope that by enhancing young people's understanding of the common issues around land acquisition and retention, they will lead the way in promoting a cooperative movement for equality and sustainability.

The Youth Land Summit is sponsored by the Center for Minority Land and Community Security (CMLCS), a coalition of several partners (Federation of Southern Cooperatives—Land Assistance Fund, Tuskegee University, University of Wisconsin, University of Madison, Indian Land Working Group, Intertribal Agricultural Council, Center for Land Grant Studies, New Farms, and New Mexico State University). The organization encourages and supports activities in land retention, acquisition, and land-based economic development that focuses on the long-term economic viability of rural African American, Native American, and Hispanic American communities.

Submissions

Rural Roots contains stories that share the incredible variety of place-based work going on around the country, its successes and challenges. Stories on rural community development, individuals and organizations making a difference in education and community life, and practitioner interests are all highlighted throughout the year.

Rural Roots is published six times per year and is distributed to more than 6,000 constituents. We encourage stories that focus on groundbreaking place-based education projects, youth-adult partnerships, small schools and consolidation, economic development, conservation, the arts, and instructive resource guides geared to teachers, to name a few.

We publish stories ranging from 400 to 2,000 words. If you are interested in submitting an idea for an article, please e-mail the editor at editor@ruraledu.org or call (202) 955-7177. We cannot offer payment for articles.

Achieving Academic Goals Through Place-Based Learning

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systematically document the indigenous knowledge systems of Alaska Native people and develop educational policies and practices that effectively integrate indigenous and Western knowledge through a renewed educational system.” AKRSI has documented eighth grade scores on CAT-5 math tests for four years with schools using place-based education showing a gain in scores over schools that do not. AKRSI districts now have 24.3 percent of their students performing in the upper quartile of the CAT-5 math test—less than one percent below the national average.

Barnhardt suggests that “educators need to make a mental shift to recognize that knowledge is not something you get from the outside and pour into kids’ heads.”

Students in AKRSI districts are exposed to a variety of place-based education projects that help improve their academic performance. Students participate in Native Science Fairs and create Cultural Atlases, multimedia presentations on CD-ROM or the Internet that result from students interviewing Elders in their communities and researching available documents related to indigenous knowledge systems. Students also participate with Elders in subsistence camps to learn about traditional Native subsistence activities.

AKRSI helps create curricula that focus on connecting indigenous and Western cultures and that also provide evidence for student assessment. For example, the *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools* have been developed for students, teachers, curriculum specialists, schools and communities

to provide explicit guidelines for ways to integrate the Alaska Native culture and environment into the formal education process.

Barnhardt says that the development of the *Alaska Standards for Culturally*

AKRSI has been the leading force in improving Alaska’s rural schools by setting the example that students can achieve through place-based education.

One particular rural school in Alaska has made impressive gains in academic success by implementing place-based education in recent years. Three years ago, Russian Mission School had the lowest test scores in its district and one-third of children between the ages of 12 and 16 were not attending school. Today, every school-age child is attending the school and test scores have risen dramatically. During the last academic year, all of the school’s third graders received the highest scores statewide on the Alaska Benchmark test for third grade, and six seniors passed all three sections of the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam.

What caused the turnaround at Russian Mission School? Principal Mike Hull attributes the school’s improvement to place-based education. “The change in the attitude about school in the middle grades has been tremendous,” he says.

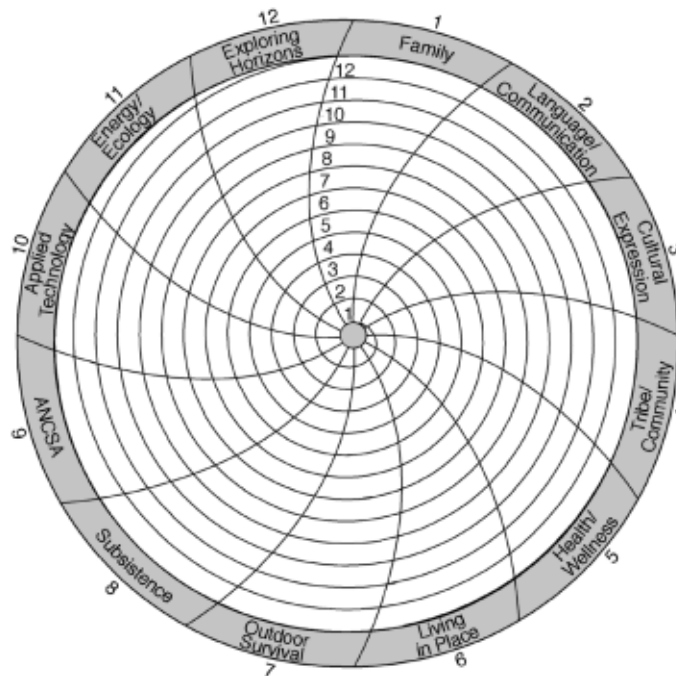
To combat the school’s problem of students dropping out, teachers and community members developed a curriculum around the subsistence activities of each season that are part of traditional Native culture in rural Alaska. In the fall, students are sent out into two-week subsistence camps where they

learn about fishing, medicinal plants, hunting, and beaver habitat. In fall 2002, students even built a cabin, which will be used for trapping in the winter. In order to document their learning, students used digital cameras, and laptop computers to create Web pages.

“They became storytellers to the global community,” says Hull.

This curriculum extended into the classroom where students would read and write about local history. Students

SPIRAL PATHWAY for INTEGRATING RURAL ALASKA LEARNING



S.P.I.R.A.L. Curriculum Chart

Outer Ring = Themes (Values) Spiral = Annual Cycle of Learning

The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative’s “Spiral Pathway for Integrating Rural Alaska Learning” curriculum.

Responsive Schools “has done more to turn things around than anything else.” The organization has also developed the “Spiral Pathway for Integrating Rural Alaska Learning” curriculum framework that centers on 12 broad cultural themes to enhance student learning.

In addition, AKRSI is developing specialized math and science curricula with Elders and teachers that relate the teaching of basic science and math concepts to the surrounding environment.

also had weekly visits with local experts to learn more about local culture.

“Some kids raised their reading level by more than a year in just five months,” says Hull.

Achievement doesn't stop there. Students will be speaking at the Native Educators' Conference in Anchorage, Alaska in February and have also been invited to participate at an international symposium in Japan.

The success at Russian Mission School is just one victory of AKRSI's influence in schools in rural Alaska.

Most importantly, as a result of AKRSI's work, Native education is beginning to have a broader audience, which Barnhardt considers the organization's greatest accomplishment. “We've been able to bring Native educators out of the woodwork and to the forefront where they are now having a significant impact throughout rural Alaska,” he says.

AKRSI is truly a model of how documenting students' academic progress in place-based education initiatives can meet accountability standards. The success at Russian Mission School is only one case where student work has improved.

School Teams Up with Oregon Department of Forestry

Tillamook Junior High School in Tillamook, Oregon, a national service learning leadership school, is no stranger to linking place-based education and academics.

In a community where logging is an important part of the local economy, 125 math students conducted a “snag” survey over four years (1999–2002) with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODOF). The term “snag,” used by loggers, refers to tree stumps. Because loggers are required to leave a certain number of both standing trees and snags to help revitalize animal habitat, students helped calculate how many trees and snags remained in logged areas. After measuring, students logged their findings into an ODOF mapping and data program. What the students learned about measurement



Left: Cement footprint stamps for the interpretive walkway for the Oregon Department of Forestry. Below: Tillamook student makes a cement footprint.

and calculation allowed them to come within tenths of the actual measurements determined by professional surveyors.

More recently, eighth graders at Tillamook Junior High School have embarked on a new project, creating an “interpretive walkway” for a new office building for the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The interpretive walkway is a trail leading up to the building with cement footprints of Oregon's animals leading up to the entrance. For the project, students learned about different animal tracks and used plotting and graphing skills to measure the pace of each animal. Afterward, students modeled the animal tracks on paper (8 ½ x 11) to scale (16 x 20). Students then calculated the actual volume of the cement needed to make the animal tracks, determined its cost, and applied cement “stamps” to create the animal tracks on the interpretive walkway.

The advantages of this project with the Department of Forestry are numerous, according to Jill Sumerlin, the students' eighth grade math teacher. “This has shown students how people in real walks of life use math in their everyday jobs,” she says. “And it gives them the opportunity to apply statistics and measurement skills and work in research teams.”

“We used math a lot in this project,” says student Dylan Ray. “We used it to calculate the volume of cement and determine how much needed to be ordered to fill the space for our tracks. We did a scale model of our plan and then transferred that scale model to life-sized



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butcher paper. Then we had to draw our animal tracks with the correct pacing according to the scale drawing we had created.”

Classmate Kapono Jacob describes the collaborative process: “We had 12 sections and a team of us worked on each section to get it done before the cement was too far gone to make the tracks. Timing was everything—we had to work together to get the job done.”

Beyond learning applied math skills, students took pride in working collaboratively and doing a project in the community.

“It was fun to do something in the community,” student Ali Prince says.

Student Anglica Perez looked upon the experience as something she'd always remember. “When I grow older and the building is done, I will sure come and see the tracks that we placed there and I will remember how the wolf walked or the elk tracked,” she says.

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Working on the interpretive walkway was particularly memorable for James Bohnke, a student whose father is helping construct the new building. "My Dad is a contractor working on the building and I got to be there at the same time he was working. It made me feel as if I was part of the work he does and I could see how important it is to plan ahead and make sure we have everything laid out just right because with cement, you don't have much time. It has to be perfect," he says.

The interpretive walkway project has done wonders for students who were once falling behind in the classroom. "I have one particular student who had an attendance problem. She is now so motivated by this project that she never misses class and her grades are improving," says Sumerlin.

Kris Babbs, educational specialist at the Oregon Department of Forestry, says working with schools is fundamental to the department's mission. Babbs directed the students the day they made the cement stamps for the interpretive walkway at the new office building site this past December. "I thought it would be a challenging endeavor, but it ended up working quite well," she says.

"They were able to create a sidewalk art project and enhanced the look of the new Tillamook office building," she continues. "Not only did they benefit from the learning, but it will continue to teach the visiting public."

Watching the Skies in Colorado

Two afternoons each week, K-8 students at Guffey Community Charter School in central Colorado monitor the stars in a Denver Museum of Nature & Science program called "All Sky." The museum has established a network of 11 cameras at Colorado schools to monitor and record meteorite movement across the state.

At Guffey School, the program is referred to as "Sky Watch." Working with local physicist Chris Peterson, who is also a volunteer researcher with the museum, Guffey students monitor movement of meteorites and fireballs with the Sky Watch camera, compile the data and send it back to the museum.

The Sky Watch camera was set up at Guffey Community Charter School in November 2001 after nearly a year of planning. The school was the first in the state to have a Sky Watch camera and is the only elementary school involved with the program.

"The museum had two goals with the All Sky Camera Project: to collect scientific data and involve school kids in real science," says Peterson.

According to Frank Sanders, designer of the first All Sky camera prototype, the project has enormous potential. "Now, we'll be able to calculate exact paths of

fireballs through our atmosphere. We'll also be able to compute the original orbits through the solar system, estimate zones where resulting meteorites may have landed on the ground and potentially discover unrealized meteor patterns," he says.

Peterson, who finalized the camera design, says: "If you simply recorded the sky all night, someone would have to watch hours of tape just to find a few meteors. Instead, the camera is connected to a computer that constantly watches the video, saving clips of objects moving in certain ways."

The Sky Watch program at Guffey School is popular among students; nearly half the student body (15 students out of 35) participates.

"This is real science. It's authentic work," says Peg Larson, the lead teacher at Guffey School involved in Sky Watch this year. "The students are asking scientific questions, not in a vacuum, and they are writing for a purpose. This is very powerful for students. It helps a child's whole self concept and makes them enthusiastic about school."

Larson says that the school is lucky to have a community volunteer like Peterson who spends his free time helping students learn real science. "How lucky can you be?" she asks. She also notes that many schools would not create as much time in the curriculum to spend intensely studying one aspect of science. "Other schools might say, 'We only have two weeks to spend on astronomy in our science curriculum,' so they wouldn't do the project. We're very fortunate."

Entrepreneurship Class Restores and Runs Local Theater in Nebraska

An entrepreneurship class at Boone Central High School in Albion, Nebraska has taken business education to a new level: they are running a local theater. The Gateway Theatre was built in 1911 and was a relic from the past that was no longer in use. That's when approximately 21 students in an elective entrepreneurship class (grades 10-12) decided to take action. During the 2001 school year, the

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PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRIS PETERSON

Community volunteer Chris Peterson, teacher Peg Larson, and Guffey Community Charter School students stand in front of the Sky Watch camera in Guffey, Colorado.

Place-Based Education: What Rural Schools Need to Stimulate Real Learning

By Robert Yager

There has never been a time when it is so clear that typical instruction wedded to textbooks and teacher lesson plans and characterized by discipline-bound classes throughout the school day must be changed. These conditions do not improve learning—they inhibit it.

Place-based education makes science, social studies, mathematics, reading, and the humanities more interesting. By integrating place into the school curriculum, learning can be seen as important for daily living; it deals with issues, enables students to participate in societal decisions, and can be related to economic improvement. Place-based education provides a real-world context that is missing from a prescribed curriculum, (i.e., strict adherence to a textbook, the recall of information or replication of specific skills that provide the instructional and assessment focus for 95 percent of typical instruction in most classrooms).

Many national standards reports are emphasizing goals that relate the core curriculum courses to life outside of school. For example, the four goals for science included in the National Science Education Standards call for developing students who:

1. experience the richness and excitement of knowing about and understanding the natural world;
2. use appropriate scientific processes and principles in making personal decisions;
3. engage intelligently in public discourse and debate about matters of scientific and technological concern; and
4. increase their economic productivity through the use of the knowledge, understanding, and skills of the scientifically literate person in their careers.

Place-based education emphasizes and provides the needed context for learning. It is not enough to organize



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*Place-based education
emphasizes and provides
the needed context
for learning.*

the concepts and processes that tend to define the disciplines. It is the situation (i.e., real experiences, environmental problems, local issues) that invite mind engagement—the other missing ingredients in typical school/classroom-based programs.

Many recognize the necessity of stimulating a student's mind beyond memorization if real learning is to result. The following situations illustrate context and the way place-based education tends to succeed in capturing the interest and the minds of students.

1. Students must help define the content, often by asking questions.
2. Students must be given time to wonder and to find interesting pursuits.
3. Topics often have “strange” features that evoke questions.
4. Teachers encourage and request different views and forms of expression.
5. The richest activities are “invented” by teachers and students.
6. Students create original and public products that enable them to be “experts.”
7. Students take some action as a result of their study and their learning.
8. Students sense that the results of their work are not predetermined or fully predictable (Perrone, 1994).

Rural schools can and should take the lead to integrate place-based education within school curricula. Rural schools have an advantage in that they are generally smaller, closer to nature, less bureaucratic and therefore, can be more flexible in terms of new learning models that engage students. Local contexts can enliven the school program and succeed with mind engagement of students, both of which rarely occur in school-based learning. Dealing with real problems in a local context in a rural school could provide the needed model to change the focus of education to show that place-based learning can make a real difference in students' education and in their lives.

Robert Yager is a professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Iowa.

Reference

Perrone, V. (1994). How to engage students in learning. *Educational Leadership*, 51 (5), 11–13.

A “Web of Life” in Nebraska

Nebraska’s Teacher of the Year, Suzanne Ratzlaff, a fourth grade teacher at Heartland Community Schools in Henderson, will be participating in a ceremony for the graduating high school senior class to cut the “Web of Life” they did as a class project in her fourth grade class.

In the mid 1990s, when this year’s Heartland seniors were in Ratzlaff’s fourth grade class, she created a “Web of Life” based on a Native American book, *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*. The quote by Chief Seattle, “We did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves,” inspired the idea. A fourth grader suggested that the web was like their classroom—their class was their own web and how each member acted impacted the web of the class because they were a community. To illustrate the concept, Ratzlaff created an actual “Web of Life” using a hula hoop and string.

“Every time a student behaved badly, I cut a piece of the web,” says Ratzlaff. “And when a student accomplished something or learned from a mistake, I made knots to show growth.”

At the end of the year, Ratzlaff asked her fourth graders what she should do with their Web of Life. They told her that they wanted her to save it until their senior year, and then cut a piece of it for each student as a keepsake.

In May, Ratzlaff and her former fourth grade class will have a Web of Life cutting ceremony where she will distribute a piece of the web to each of her former students. “My hope is that there will be enough knots to give one to each student,” she says.



*Left: Students in the Gateway Theatre in Albion, Nebraska.
Below: The grand opening of the Gateway Theatre.*



BOONE CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Achieving Academic Goals Through Place-Based Learning

from page 8

students raised funds and purchased the theater for \$37,000 on January 18, 2002. After renovations, the theater had its grand opening in May 2002. Nebraska Senator Vicki MacDonald and the mayor of Albion, Jim Tisthammer, participated in the “film” cutting ceremony at the grand opening.

Today, students and community volunteers operate the theater after school and on weekends.

“Being in the entrepreneur class has widened my horizons—it has helped me become more confident in public speaking, and taught me how to write minutes for meetings,” says junior Cassie Olson.

Classmate Brent Bygland, also a junior, agrees. “Through this class I have learned the responsibilities of opening and running a successful business,” he says.

Lisa Carder, entrepreneurship teacher at Boone High School, says that the experience has been a positive one for students. She says that opening the theater has helped students perform better academically. “Strong students will be

strong no matter what. But introverted students become more confident with projects like these and the result is improved academic performance,” she says. “Math and computer curricula tie in to the project and students understand that.”

Besides students, many local volunteer groups work at the theater and they receive \$150 per weekend for their services. This provides a means for organizations to raise funds without having to solicit from the community. Groups that have participated include 4-H clubs, Future Business Leaders of America, church groups, Girl Scouts, Albion Volunteer Fire Department, Lions Club, and Kiwanis Club.

Students Fostering Achievement in California

When it comes to improving academic performance, it’s not just the adults who want to see results. At Nordhoff High School in Ojai, California, three students—senior Azucena “Susie” Ortiz and juniors Claudia

Martinez and Leticia Ortiz—have taken matters into their own hands by starting Union Hispana, a student-to-student tutoring club.

The club, which began in fall 2002, matches students with strengths in certain academic subjects to serve as tutors to other students who need help in those areas.

Janice McCormick, a Nordoff guidance counselor, says that what's unique about Union Hispana is that it was completely student initiated. "One of the founders, Azucena Ortiz, told me she wanted to leave something behind when she left the school," she recalls.

"We began the Union Hispana because we decided we didn't want to be minority anymore and we want to succeed," says co-founder Azucena Ortiz. "At school we noticed how not many of

the Hispanic students attending school knew how to even turn on a computer. Most haven't even passed the proficiency test required to graduate. So we had to do something to help them," she continues.

More than 150 students—more than half of the high school's student body—attended the first meeting of Union Hispana.

The focus is on English, math and computers, although tutors are willing to help students in any subject area.

The members of the club named the group Union Hispana. "Since most of us are Hispanics and we are all uniting,

the name Union Hispana (Hispanic Union) came into our heads," says Ortiz.

Currently, the group helps mostly Hispanic youth, but they help any student regardless of ethnic origin.

The immediate goal for Union Hispana this year is to have each student in the senior class graduate.

Ortiz has high hopes for students who will benefit

from Union Hispana's tutoring services. "We really want to see more students get past high school and into college and beyond that also," she says. "We want them to focus on their future and what they want to become.

To improve academic achievement, three students in Ojai, California, formed Union Hispana, a student-to-student tutoring club.

ResourceCenter

Articles

"Competencies that Count: Strategies for Assessing High-Performance Skills" by Lilli Allen. Available online at http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/comp_count/comp_sahps.pdf

"A Close Look at Student Work in Small Schools" from What Kids Can Do. Available online at <http://www.whatkidscando.org/smallschools/intro.html>

"The Digital Portfolio: A Richer Picture of Student Performance" by David Niguidula, Coalition of Essential Schools. Available online at http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/225

"High Standards for Essential Learning Demand a Mix of Measures" by Kathleen Cushman, *Horace*. Volume 16, Number 3, June 2000. Available online at http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/179

"'Trusting' School Community Linked to Student Gains" by Catherine Gewertz, *Education Week*, October 16, 2002. Available online at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=07trust.h22>

Books and Reports

100 Days of Learning in Place: How a Small School Utilized "Place-Based" Learning to Master State Academic Standards by James Lewicki, Rural School and Community Trust, June 2000. Available free from the Rural Trust.

Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools published by the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, available online at <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/standards/>

Assessing Student Work by Barbara Cervone, Rural School and Community Trust, January 2001. Available online at http://www.ruraledu.org/assess_guide.pdf

Bibliography on Assessment: Factors that Influence Achievement from Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 1996

Learning Outside the Lines: Six Innovative Programs that Reach Youth, What Kids Can Do, available online at <http://www.whatkidscando.org/intheirrownwords/LearningLines.pdf>

Planning for Youth Success: Supplement to Resource and Training Manual: Assessing Youth Success by Lena Ko, Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 2002

Web Sites

Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu>

Cloudbait Observatory <http://www.cloudbait.com>

Coalition for Essential Schools

<http://www.essentialschools.org>

Denver Museum of Nature & Science

<http://www.dmns.org>

Project Zero <http://www.pzweb.harvard.edu>

What Kids Can Do <http://www.whatkidscando.org>

GrantsWatch

In lieu of listing available grants in this issue of Rural Roots, we are featuring the following article on how to raise funds in rural and small communities.

Small-Town Limitations Don't Reduce Fundraising Options

By Sabrina Jones

Quaint. Quiet. Peaceful.

Those are just some of the adjectives people often use when describing small-town life. Usually, most of these people have never actually lived in a small town. Those of us who were raised or are currently living in small-town America know that in order to accomplish something, you must participate and oftentimes be in charge of it. This article defines a small town as one with a population of fewer than 1,000 people. My town of St. John, Washington, has a population of approximately 600.

Small-town life is when you can walk the entire length of Main Street in three or four blocks. It's when you can pick up a few groceries, tools from the hardware store and a birthday card from the local pharmacy—all without taking your purse or wallet. It's when the idea of "going out on the town" involves dinner and a basketball game at the only school in town.

The purpose of this article is to help you discover the most effective way to raise money for your town's next project—and how to make it happen through planning, perseverance and patience. I know because I have done it. In just 15 months, the St. John Playground Equipment Committee I formed raised more than \$30,000 for a new playground structure at our elementary school in this farming town of 600 residents.

So, don't give up because you're small. Just scream really loud.

Where Do I Start?

Chances are, if you're the person reading this article, you're also the one who should be in charge of your fundraising

project. You've got initiative and drive—two of the most important attributes in making a project happen.

So you know what you need to raise money for: a new playground, skate park, swimming pool, children's museum or something else that you believe will enhance your community.

The first thing you need to do is talk. Then talk some more. Talk until you are so tired of talking that you can't do it anymore. This is an "informal survey" of local residents' reactions to your idea. You'll find out who might be willing to help, and who won't. If you get positive reactions from most people, then you can move on to the next step in the process.

How Do I Form a Committee?

Find people who are truly interested in reaching your goal and willing to invest their time to get there. Keep it small, with no more than 10 people. Remember, the more people on your committee, the more opinions you'll have and the harder it will be to reach an agreement.

How Should I Schedule Meetings?

The last thing most people want is one more meeting to attend. So when you have to plan one, make it at the *most* convenient time for *most* of the people on your committee. Tell them you will bring snacks. Food is a great motivator.

Have an agenda for each meeting and follow it. Set dates, deadlines and assign specific responsibilities to your committee members.

Have your meeting last about one hour. Many of your volunteers (including yourself) have other obligations. Encourage them to bring their kids (and provide them with games, puzzles or coloring books). Although your fundraising project is important, always keep in mind that your committee members are there because they choose to be, so make their time as effective and productive as you can.

How Long is this Project Going to Take, Anyway?

It's very important to establish a project timeline. Do you expect to be doing fundraising activities for 12 months, two years or five years?

As a committee, establish a realistic timeline that doesn't drag on endlessly because everyone starts losing interest—your donors, your committee members, even you. Start off running and don't pass up any money-making opportunity for your endeavor. Determine how many fundraisers your committee wants to undertake each season and an estimated dollar amount from each fundraiser. When is your community's "busy time?" Is the annual town celebration in July? Which high school sports draw the most fans? Do those Little League kids and their families go hungry because there's no dinner offered at their games? Are there any craft fairs, town garage sales, golf tournaments or home tours that your committee can participate in and earn money at? Get a calendar, find out what's already scheduled and get moving.

Be aware of existing fundraisers sponsored by other organizations in your community and don't conflict with them if you can help it. Don't compete—

complement! You may just find that some will donate a portion of their proceeds to your cause. Keep community members informed of your progress via local newspapers and other free media. Even signs taped on Main Street businesses keep your endeavor in people's minds.

What About Grants?

Grants are great, but grants take time. If you have time, then apply for one. There are lots of grants out there. Half the battle is to know where to look and then hope that someone on your committee has some writing skills to complete the grant application. A Web site worth looking at can be found at <http://www.schoolgrants.org>.

What Types of Fundraisers Should I Consider?

Most of us have had the "bake sale and car wash" experiences. They are old standbys and even in today's world, they still merit some attention.

Let's broaden our horizons a bit.

If you're like me, you're getting a bit tired of buying magazines you could otherwise live without. You can get cuter gift wrap at your local pharmacy.

Many large fundraising companies forget about us small-town types. How many children in a town of fewer than 1,000 people are going to earn \$1,500 in sales to qualify for the prize DVD player? But you *can* get your kids involved and excited about your fundraising project. How? By having a lot of different events with recognition for their participation. In other words, put their names in your local newspaper, or create a newsletter if you have to with pictures of "winners" and stories of who was there. They will soon start believing that they are a key element to your project's success.

Try to choose fundraisers relatively low-cost in terms of your labor and time, but high in the financial return department. Here are some of my favorite (and financially beneficial) fundraisers:

- **Business Mailings.** Yes, it sounds boring, but it works. Do this halfway through your project to remind local merchants of your past and upcoming

fundraisers, how much money you've raised to date and how much you would appreciate their financial support.

- **Donor Walls.** Businesses and people love to be recognized. Either choose a flat dollar amount (i.e., \$250 for any business or individual), or a varying level (i.e., lifetime, charter and friend members). Select your preferred method and then tell everyone about it (include it in your business mailing, above!).

Don't give up because you're small.

Whether they buy a brick, a picket on a fence or their name on a sign, this fundraiser is one of the easiest for your committee to conduct.

- **Auctions/Raffles.** An auction is a lot of work, but if your community doesn't have one yet, you must do it! Possible auction items can range from a child's artwork to a vacation package. Some of our highest bid items were those that offered three dozen cookies or a loaf of homemade bread each month for one year. Also, since babysitters are few and far between in small towns, consider offering complimentary babysitting at a local church during your auction.

- **A-Thons.** Whether it's a walk/run/rock/jump/read-a-thon, these are ideal for raising money *outside* of your community. Small-town businesses are asked quite frequently to donate to this and that, so it's important to give them a break. Tell the kids to call their Aunt Zelda in Walla Walla or their cousin Billy in Kalamazoo. Family members are usually pretty good about helping their extended family.

- **Community Service.** Providing a community service is a great way to earn money and help make your residents' lives a little easier at the same time. Ideas include raking leaves, mowing lawns, washing windows, recycling cans and papers, picking up groceries, general housecleaning and even making meals (think of it as a "personal chef").

- **School/Town Pride.** People in small towns love to show their spirit. Do

your residents have a school-colored antenna ball on their vehicles? Do you offer miniature wood storefronts to your alumni who have moved away? Does any group sell small pompoms to those little girls who idolize the high school cheerleaders?

- **Holiday Events.** Holidays are busy times, but they can also be money-making times for your cause. Does anyone put on a Halloween haunted house?

What about providing gift-wrapping services to those who don't have the time? Can your committee hang up holiday lights for businesses and private homes? Show the love

on Valentine's Day by selling heart-shaped, U-bake pizzas and delivering them to the door with (what else?) a few chocolate kisses.

- **Carnivals/Fairs.** Your community likely has an annual celebration. Is there an opportunity for your committee to make money at this event? If so, the possibilities are endless. Rent an inflatable jumping castle or climbing wall, set up a BINGO game with fun prizes, provide face painting or set up a You-Made-It Art Station. The key to your success is to find out what sells best based on your community's needs.

What's so Great About Forming a Foundation?

Forming a foundation can be a worthwhile effort. The basic premise for forming one is to make you tax-exempt and to make donations to your cause tax-deductible. To learn more about foundations, contact The Foundation Center at www.fdncenter.org or the Council on Foundations at <http://www.cof.org>.

There is nothing else quite like the feeling of accomplishment. After 15 months of planning and implementing fundraisers, organizing and conducting meetings, removing and installing equipment, our elementary school has one brand new playground structure that makes all 90 students smile. And, not one of them got a DVD player.

Sabrina Jones is a freelance writer specializing in the education and health care fields. She can be reached by e-mail at sabrina@stjohncable.com.

Datebook

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Leadership Council (NYLC); Leslie Lenkowsky, CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service; and Harris Wofford, a former U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania and former CEO of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Visit the conference Web site at <http://www.nylc.org/conference2003/> for complete information or call (651) 631-3672.

Plan Ahead!

July 13–16, 2003

Rural/Small Schools System Leaders Conference

Grand Summit Resort Hotel and Conference Center, Park City, Utah

“Leaving No School Leader Behind: Being Successful for Kids” is the theme of this year’s Rural/Small Schools System Leaders Conference hosted by the

American Association of School Administrators (AASA). Planning for the conference is still under way, but sessions will include a panel discussion on No Child Left Behind and open discussions with AASA’s Rural and Small School Advisory Committee and committee on important issues affecting rural schools. More detailed information will be available in the coming months. To stay abreast of conference happenings, call (703) 528-0700 or visit <http://www.aasa.org/conferences/rural/index.htm>.

NewsBriefs

Rural Trust Establishes Rural Faculty

When it comes to teaching about schools and communities working together, there’s no one better than the everyday educators, community members and students across the country who do that work daily in rural America. Recognizing that our role at the Rural Trust is to help rural people help themselves, we’re establishing regional teams who are knowledgeable about and skilled at helping people develop place-based education in their communities. Five to 10 people in each of five geographic regions who are already highly skilled and experienced will become members of the Rural Faculty. They will receive training and support in order to use the training modules and materials from the Rural Trust and to develop facilitation skills that will optimize change in their own communities and others. The first training was held in November 2002 and the second training will be held in April 2003. An intensive training program on building community school collaborations will be conducted this summer for a select group of faculty members.

As place-based education grows and the Rural Trust reaches out to new places and answers requests for assistance, this highly trained faculty will be available to provide a variety of services that support place-based learning to others around the country. Faculty members may be contracted with as individuals or as a group or in conjunction with the Rural Trust stewards. All faculty members (educators, community members and students) are actively participating in place-based work in their communities and are committed to providing assistance to others when needed. Fee-based services include training, ongoing technical support and mentoring.

This people-to-people approach to building the capacity of rural Americans has tremendous potential because it honors the skills and knowledge that local people bring to

the table while giving them the tools to facilitate changes in their own communities. It also builds relationships and capitalizes on the strength of people working together within their communities and across rural America.

Look for postings on the Rural Trust Web site (<http://www.ruraledu.org>) and in future issues of *Rural Roots* to find out how you can contract with the Rural Trust for the services of the Rural Faculty, or call the Capacity Building Program office at (252) 433-8844.

Group Launches Campaign to Stop “Real Beverly Hillbillies” TV Show

The Center for Rural Strategies, an advocacy organization for rural communities based in Whitesburg, Kentucky, has launched a nationwide campaign to stop CBS producers from airing the planned reality television show, “Real Beverly Hillbillies.”

According to the organization, CBS plans to take a real family from rural America and put them on display in a Beverly Hills mansion as part of a new reality-based program. The producers of the show are actively seeking a low-income, multigenerational family with limited education from a rural area to be the real-life cast. The CBS show intends to show a rural family who won’t know how to live with money or conveniences of 21st century life.

The Center’s Rural Reality Campaign is a call to Americans to help stop CBS from producing a program that is based on stereotypes of rural people and economic injustice. The organization ran ads in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in early January encouraging the public to take action against CBS.

For further details about the Rural Reality Campaign and how to express your opinion to CBS, please visit <http://www.ruralstrategies.org>.

Publications of Note

Civic Resource Guide

Edited and compiled
by Angela Kelly
Project 540,
November 2002



Project 540, a youth civic engagement initiative funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and supported by Providence College has published a *Civic Resource Guide*. The guide is a compilation of 100 national organizations, which model unique and innovative approaches to youth activism and engagement. The guide also highlights local projects that are both youth-driven and youth-serving in all of their programs and activities. Its features include a civic engagement Calendar of the Year, a marginal reminder of both historical events and opportunities for daily reflection. An online version of the guide is available at <http://www.project540.org/crg/index.cfm>. For information on how to obtain a printed copy, call the Project 540 staff at (401) 865-2448.

One Room Out West: The Story of the Jore School and Its Students

by Rita Seedorf
Eastern Washington University Press,
February 2003

One Room Out West is the story of a one-room schoolhouse, a fading public institution that educated America's children for generations. Author Rita Seedorf, professor of education at Eastern Washington University, chronicles the history of the Jore School (originally located in rural Washington) the children who attended, the teachers who taught, and the farm families that formed the community that supported it. The book can be ordered for \$16.95 by calling (800) 441-4115. An order form can also be obtained from http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/sales_marketing/order.form.html.

Challenge and Change in Appalachia: The Story of Hindman Settlement School

by Jess Stoddart
University Press of Kentucky,
August 2002

Challenge and Change in Appalachia is the story of a school that transformed a community. Founded in 1902, the Hindman Settlement School's farms and extension work brought modern

agricultural methods to the area while encouraging preservation of Appalachian arts and music. Today, the school has innovative programs for dyslexic children, work in adult education, and cultural heritage activities that can serve as a model for other rural schools. Author Jess Stoddart is a retired professor emeritus of history at San Diego State University. The book can be ordered for \$32.00 by calling (800) 839-6855 or downloading an order form from <http://www.kentuckypress.com/orderform.cfm>.

Returning Soul to a Community

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County School District RE-1 presented a bond proposal in 2001 that would result in the building of a small middle school and high school in Lake City. In November of that year, an historic moment took place when the voters passed the first school bond election in history. By the beginning of summer 2002, construction of the buildings was in full gear.

In August 2003, there will be an official dedication of the H.G. Heath Middle School and Lake City Community High School. Speeches will be made; the band will play; the citizens will celebrate. However, the townspeople will be celebrating more than the completion

of a building; they will be celebrating the return of the very soul, its youth, to the community.

No, there is no "magic bullet" here for rural districts facing the challenge of consolidation and declining enrollment. Nonetheless, from the Lake City experience, a school district may be wise to listen carefully to its community, recognize that change may be necessary and to create a vision to address that change, and, finally, have the determination and perseverance to go forward and make that vision become a reality.

Phillip H. Virden is the executive director of the Colorado Rural Schools Caucus.

New on the Rural Trust Web Site

Check out "What's New" at www.ruraledu.org:

- New online featured column, "Diary of a Rural School Leader"
- Order form for *Why Rural Matters 2003: The Continuing Need for Every State to Take Action on Rural Education*
- Victories for Rural School Finance in Arkansas and Tennessee
- Youth Writings: Rural Students Share Their Experience As Wallis Annenberg Scholars
- A downloadable PDF version of our report, *Rural School Leadership in the Deep South: The Double-Edged Legacy of School Desegregation*



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Hot Topic

Rural Trust Publishes Updated *Why Rural Matters*

Rural children, their schools, and their communities matter, and they deserve more consideration than they get in the national debate over education policy. That is the case made by the Rural School and Community Trust in its new policy report, *Why Rural Matters 2003: The Continuing Need for Every State to Take Action on Rural Education*. The report is an analysis using statistical indicators to measure the relative importance of rural education in each of the 50 states and to document the urgency with which policymakers should give it their attention. It is an updated and expanded version of an earlier version of the report published in 2000.

Among the findings:

- Nearly one in three of America's school-age children attend public schools in rural areas or small towns of less than 25,000.
- More than one in six go to school in the very smallest communities, those with populations under 2,500.
- Forty-three percent of the nation's public schools are in rural communities or small towns of fewer than 25,000 people, and 31 percent of the nation's children attend these schools.

The report focuses on the 17 percent of American children who attend school in the smallest communities with fewer than 2,500 people, a most conservative definition of "rural." It finds

clear regional patterns, with certain states in the Mid-South Delta (Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi), central Appalachia (Kentucky, Tennessee, and West

Virginia), the coastal Southeast (Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina), the Northern Plains (Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota), and northern New England (Maine and Vermont), standing out as the priority rural education states.

The report is available for free download (PDF format) on the Rural Trust Web site at <http://www.ruraledu.org>. Or, send a check for \$10, which includes shipping, to WRM 2003, Rural School and Community Trust, 1825 K Street NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006. Orders must be prepaid.

