

What Rural Districts Are Doing

American Youth Policy Forum. (2010, April). *Challenges, Assets, and Innovations: Considerations for Secondary Education in Rural Communities*. Washington, DC: Author.

<http://www.aypf.org/tripreports/2010/documents/AYPF%20Rural%20Education%20Brief.pdf>

“This brief summarizes the lessons learned during a February 2010 AYPF study mission to North Carolina that examined how rural education systems are providing high quality instruction and improving the readiness of young people for life beyond high school. Participants learned about how federal and state policies and funding streams affect rural school districts; the unique challenges of providing high quality instruction in rural settings; and innovative approaches to providing comprehensive education in rural communities. The brief outlines several key issues affecting rural education nationwide and discusses how current federal policy priorities affect rural education.”

Lane, B. (2009). *Exploring the Pathway to Rapid District Improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Academic Development Institute.

<http://www.centerii.org/survey/>

“The purpose of this report is to describe a framework for district capacity building and improvement and...explore how districts can engage in rapid and sustainable improvement efforts. The supporting research, [the] framework, and a corresponding set of rapid improvement indicators [are] provided...Included in the report is a summary of issues for consideration by state officials and districts focused on creating the conditions necessary to catalyze rapid and sustainable district improvement.” Two detailed case studies of rapidly improving districts, urban and rural, provide illustrative examples of “how districts can engage in rapid and sustainable improvement efforts.” The rural district, Burrton Public Schools in central Kansas, reorganized the district office to support improvement efforts, supported collective problem solving, created a culture of shared responsibility and accountability, and built instructional capacity. Over a five-year period, student proficiency rates improved from the 50–60% range to 92% in reading and 88% in mathematics.

National Network of School Improvement Leaders. (2010, July 23) *Supporting Rural Schools and Districts*. (webinar).

<http://www.centerii.org/leaders/>

How do states provide support for rural schools and districts? This webinar examines statewide efforts to disseminate, institutionalize and sustain strategies for school improvement in small and rural schools and districts, taking into consideration the challenges and opportunities inherent in these communities. Featured presenters are Andrea Browning (American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF)), Bryan Setser (North Carolina Department of Education) and Mark Bounds (South Carolina State Department of Education). Andrea Browning begins the webinar by presenting the context and reporting on AYPF latest field trip examining secondary education in rural settings. Bryan Setser shares one of North Carolina’s innovative strategies—the North Carolina Virtual Public Schools—as one state’s approach using information technology to address the instructional and curricular needs of the state’s students. Mark Bounds discusses how South Carolina addresses the human capital pipeline for the states’ rural schools by profiling the

strategies the states use to recruit, train, and support teachers and principals going to rural schools and districts. Presenters reveal how the various innovations and strategies are designed, implemented, and sustained and discuss the challenges and issues to consider.

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP). (2010, July 23). *ESEA Reauthorization: Rural High School Reform*. Gillette, WY.

(a) Testimony of Rollin Abernethy, associate provost for academic affairs, University of Wyoming, Laramie, and President, Wyoming P-16 Education Council

<http://help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Abernethy.pdf>

The presenter focuses on six strategies that “will advance a more rigorous, effective and seamless educational system and support high school reform.” These initiatives include:

1. A defined and rigorous high school curriculum;
2. Articulations by disciplinary faculty members across grades 9 through 16;
3. The Wyoming P–16 Education Council’s high school and college course comparison charts;
4. Common Core State Standards initiative and comprehensive standards assessment consortia;
5. Teacher preparation at the University of Wyoming; and
6. Engaging the community to support more effective schools.

(b) Testimony of Brandon Jensen, principal, Cody High School, Cody, Wyoming

<http://help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Jensen.pdf>

This principal shares his “perspective about how high schools have changed and adapted to meet the diverse needs of students,” strategies being used at his high school “to engage students in their education and prepare them with the knowledge and skills they need for success in postsecondary education and the workforce” the transformation of the school culture to one that is “collaborative, learning-focused, and dynamic.” The speaker also addresses “some of the benefits and challenges that are specific to small rural high schools.”

(c) Testimony of Kevin Mitchell, superintendent, Park County School District #1, Powell, Wyoming

<http://help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Mitchell4.pdf>

Superintendent Mitchell outlines the strategic plan of his district and highlights a number of initiatives. The strategic plan discusses for improving student achievement, ensuring effective, efficient operations, and communications with stakeholders. The district high school offers AP classes, collaborates with a college on dual enrollment, and has established grade-level academies to achieve closer student–teacher relationships thereby reducing school dropouts. It collaborates with local businesses to offer a school-to-work program and job shadowing. Several intervention strategies have been implemented to prevent class failures, including the Lunch Intervention Program, in which students “eat lunch in the media center where they complete missing or incomplete assignments with the assistance of a tutor.”

(d) Testimony of Jim Rose, executive director, Wyoming Community College Commission.

<http://help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Rose.pdf>

This speaker's U. S. Senate testimony concerns preparation for post-secondary schooling and work. He focuses on three themes. He asserts that students "be guided in exploring and developing their own interests for future careers using the career pathways identified by the [ED] and adopted by the Wyoming Department of Education." Wyoming has sought to improve engagement and relevance by enacting legislation that allows high school students both concurrent (on school campus) and dual enrollment (off school site or on-line) in college courses. To address remediation in post-secondary institutions, Wyoming is considering joining a consortium of states in developing a common assessment of common core standards. The state has also recently approved a plan "to strengthen linkages between the K-12 system and the seven community colleges."

(e) Testimony of Lyn Velle, CTE coordinator, Campbell County School District "Restructuring Rural High Schools—A Career Academy Model"

<http://help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Rose.pdf>

This speaker catalogues the hurdles to be overcome in establishing career academies/pathways in larger rural high schools. High schools with 1000 or more students tend to see decreasing benefits in personalization and motivation from the implementation of smaller learning communities. Campbell County High School, with 1400 students, is in the process of implementing three career academies and phasing one out. The speaker addresses coursework, student and teacher recruitment and interests, teacher preparation and development, curriculum, community collaboration, school counselors, class scheduling, district and building support, physical setting, and so forth.

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP). (2010, April 13, 2010). *ESEA Reauthorization: School Turnaround*. Washington, DC.

Testimony of Tim Mitchell, superintendent of schools, Chamberlain School District, Chamberlain, South Dakota

<http://help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Mitchell3.pdf>

This speaker reports that students in his poor, high-minority rural district made significant academic gains between 2003 and 2009. He attributes this turnaround to "a relentless focus on instruction and professional development; the cultivation of teacher and principal support; the use of research-based instructional practices and strategies; and the conscious encouragement of collegiality and collaboration among all staff members."

Williams, D. T. (2010, September). *The Rural Solution How Community Schools Can Reinvigorate Rural Education*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

<http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/09/pdf/ruralschools.pdf>

This paper asserts that the challenge of obtaining high-quality, rural education "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 [in Kentucky, Vermont, and Maine] provide a framework for discussing the benefits, characteristics, and policy implications of rural community schools....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.”