

# The Rural School Community

## South Carolina Family and Community Reengagement Summit

SEPTEMBER 17, 2021



Sam Redding  
Region 6 Comprehensive Center



# Our Questions for Today

---

Rural life. What is familiar about a rural school community?

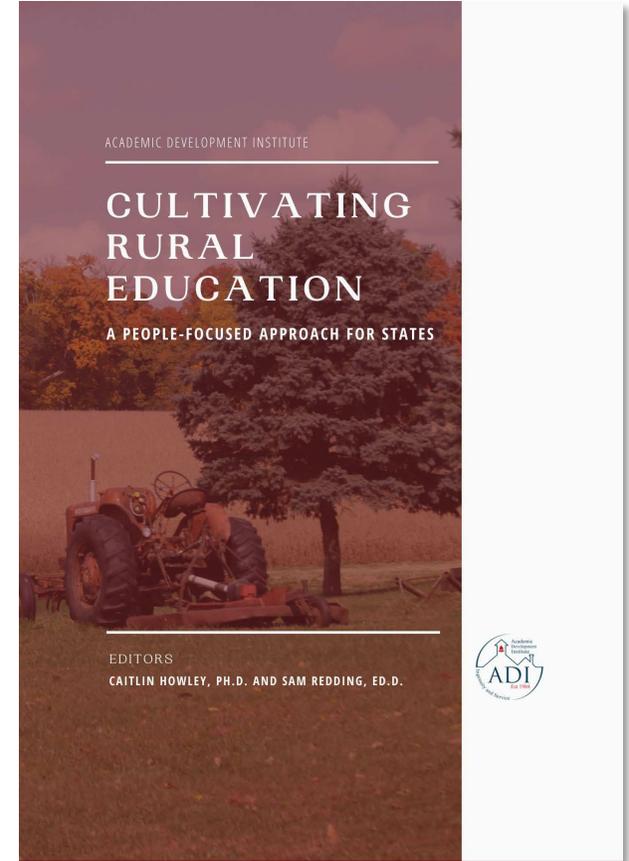
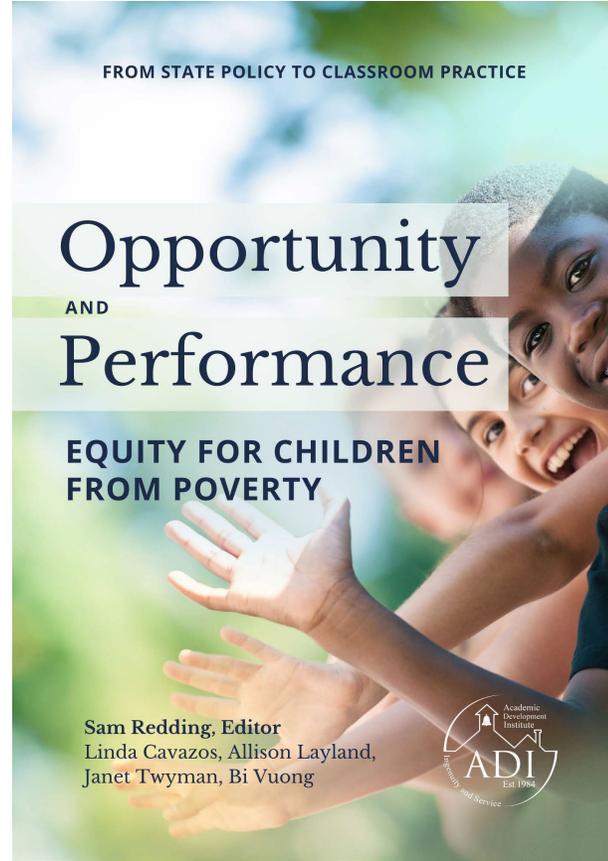
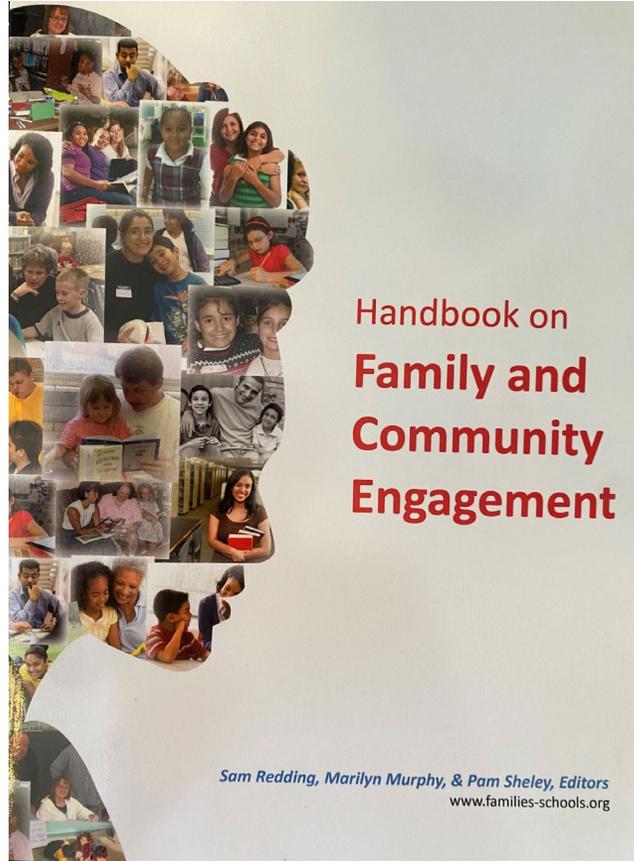
Rural facts. What do we know about rural communities?

Rural partnerships. What partnerships do schools make?

School community. Why no hyphen between the words?

Reciprocal Learning Environment. What the heck is it?

**Where can we  
find great, free  
resources??**



Rurality is more than just the size of a population or its proximity to a city; it is the meaning embodied in the daily experiences of the residents and relates to identity, perspectives, and understandings of the world.

One of the greatest challenges facing rural communities across the country is population change—out-migration, aging, international immigration, national in-migration.

As educational leaders consider collaborative work to support rural education, it is useful to reflect on two broad questions: (1) What do rural schools “do” for their communities? and (2) To whom are rural schools accountable?

Jennifer Seelig  
*Clear View of Rural Education*



REGION 6  
Georgia  
North Carolina  
South Carolina

What do you take away?  
What's familiar?  
What's changing?

---



# Hubey Rides the Bus

[ADI.ORG/RURAL](https://www.adi.org/rural)

[ADI.ORG/RURAL/HUBEY RIDES THE BUS.PDF](https://www.adi.org/rural/hubey_rides_the_bus.pdf)



# Sound familiar?

# Or not?

Hubey Pokorski is a lanky, growth-spurting ninth grader. Stretching out, his head lurching forward, he hurdles two steps onto the school bus. Sarah June, Hubey's seventh-grade sister, follows behind. She mounts the steps onto the bus with poise and careful intention. Hubey turns a sharp corner at seat 7A and plants himself next to the window. Sarah June, looking straight ahead, smiles and waves to her cousin, Celi Vasquez, also a seventh grader.

Henry, the bus driver, sets the vehicle in motion. It is 6:39 in the morning. Hubey and Sarah June left their house at 6:30, walked to the end of the driveway, and were ready for the scheduled 6:40 pickup. Art Pokorski, a machinist at Blenton Manufacturing in town, left home this morning as the kids were finishing their breakfast. His wife, Maria, would be leaving shortly to start her day as cook at the elementary school.



Henry will make 17 stops over a 26-mile circuit, boarding 24 more junior high students before depositing them at Blechford Junior High, the western wing of Blechford Senior High in the nearby town of Blechford.

Three more buses will appear at 5:00 that afternoon for the students who participate in after-school activities—basketball, cheerleading, student council, 4-H, Boy Scouts, computer club, chess club. A few more students will spill out of detention hall, sniggering, to join the late bus.



REGION 6  
Georgia  
North Carolina  
South Carolina

Three farm boys, all eighth graders, crowd into the seat behind Hubey and Sarah June. As their dad has explained to them, two of the boys—Beau and Josh—come from families that own large farms. Pete, the third boy, is the son of a tenant farmer; his dad works for Josh’s dad, and Pete’s family lives in a house provided them on the farm. Beau and Josh’s families own the tractors and plows and cattle; Pete’s family works with them.

At one stop, by a farmhouse, Naomi boards the bus and takes seat 3A, where she sits alone. She turns her head and smiles at Hubey, who grins and waves. Naomi is a special needs eighth grader who leaves her regular classes for part of each day for help in the resource room. Her dad is a farmer and her mother a schoolteacher. Naomi's sister Julia, a junior in high school, is the top student and president of her class. Hubey thinks about Naomi a lot, wondering that she seems sad even when she smiles. He worries that she is always alone, and that two of the boys sitting behind her like to tease her. The other kids on the bus are kind to her, but don't really include her in their small clusters that form on the school ground and in the hallways.



Wintonka is an interesting town, surprisingly diverse, due largely to the types of employment it offers. For many years, the mushroom farm (actually a dark, indoor growing area and canning factory) has been a center of employment for families originally from Mexico. The Pokorskis and other workers at Blenton Manufacturing, are grandchildren and great-grandchildren of coal miners who came to this area from eastern Europe to work the mines. When the mines gave out, they took jobs in factories.

Children from all of these families take their seats on the bus with Hubey and Sarah June, their classmates. They grow up together.

In some ways, Hubey's bus trip is like the one his father and mother took when they were students at BJHS. Hubey's grandfather Joseph Pokorski was in school before the three districts around Wintonka consolidated. Joe walked to the old K-8 grade school each morning, collecting his friend Danny Rosenthal who lived on the way to school.



The Rosenthals moved away from Wintoka when they closed their men's clothing store, a fixture on the town square for 60 years. When Joe Pokorski returned from the army, he was pleased to land a job at Blenton Manufacturing, and the managers at Blenton, finding Joe to be bright and hardworking, were likewise pleased to apprentice him to a tool and die maker. By the time Joe's son Art followed in his father's footsteps at Blenton, Joe's craft, with its "Jo blocks" and precision hand tools, was giving way to computers and robots.

The townies who meet at the grade school to board the bus each morning include children from families new to Wintonka since Joe Pokorski's day. Dajuan Campbell's father, a pharmacist, was born in Jamaica, and his wife, Sonja, a doctor at the Wintonka Family Medical Center, was born in New York. About the time the Rosenthals left town, the Patels and Hendricksons arrived to manage the new convenience store and the Ready-Mart. Hundreds of other families left, and new ones came, and, overall, the population of the area notched downward a few percent each census.



# Questions at Teacher Workshop

How best to prepare students with such varied interests and talents, knowing also that their interests will change as they continue with their schooling.

Who will go to college? Military? Technical school? Hard to know.

Who will change their major? Change their occupation? When and how often? Also hard to know.

Which students will remain in the area, and which students will move away?

What common, solid foundation can a small, rural school provide to benefit all its students?

How can the school differentiate the learning paths to account for the differences in interest and ability?

What specific subjects do some students need, in depth, that not all students will require?

What do we teach through our extracurricular activities and off-campus work experiences?

What strengths of this rural school district offset the limitations of its resources?

# Questions for You

---

If a family is considering whether to relocate to your rural district from the suburbs, and the parents ask you to describe, with some specificity, what your district will provide their children that they may not have received in their suburban schools, what would you tell them?

What does this have to do with school community?



# What do we know about rural communities?

# Rural School Facts

19% of the U.S. population live in rural places (U.S. Census, 2017).

One-third of public schools in the country are rural.

Between the 1999–2000 and 2014–2015 academic years nationwide, the percentage of rural non-White students rose from 17.0% to 25.7%,

Increases in rural non-White student populations increased 32.1% in the West, 33.6% in the South, 104.8% in the Midwest, and 128% in the Northeast.

Once the effect of socioeconomic status is controlled for, any apparent disparities between rural and nonrural student achievement disappear (Lee, 2001; Williams, 2005).

The achievement gap between White and African American and Hispanic students is smaller in rural than in urban districts [Gagnon & Mattingly, 2018].)

# Employment in Rural Areas

---

Education, health care, and social assistance industries—22.3%

Manufacturing (12.1%),

Retail trade (10.9%),

Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining (9.6%),

Construction (8.4)

Reliance on a single industry, placing them in precarious economic situations

- mineral extraction industry, such as coal mining or fracking.
- large meatpacking industries and have experienced an influx of new immigrant populations
- tourism industries

(Laughlin, 2016)



# What about school partnerships in rural communities?

# School – community Partnerships

Cooperative extensions from universities and 4-H

Churches for clothing and personal hygiene products; food backpack program, which provides children with food for days not spent in school.

Parents to build a community garden

Department of Natural Resources office to test water quality and teach children about the local fishing industry and environmental protections.

Town library to provide thematic reading opportunities to children through summer programming or with the

Local government to improve a community playground.

Health department and local 4-H chapters to provide enrichment activities and educational programming.

Robotics and STEM learning and with the community college,

Local tribe to provide education around equity issues to youth and community members

Nonprofit organizations to provide emergency housing to families, wellness education, GED coursework, family literacy education, mental health services, access to nutritious food and books, and support to parents and grandparents.



# County-level Organization

---

Garrett County Public Schools (Maryland): Harnessing the Power of Personal Relationships -Collaborations between GCPS and its partners, in total, serve Garrett County youth from birth through college.

M3T (Mathematics Master Teacher): An Innovative Collaboration Between Rural Schools and Powerful Partners (Pocahontas County Schools, West Virginia). Later scaled to five rural counties

Reconnecting McDowell: Bringing Together Unlikely Partners for Community Lift (McDowell County, West Virginia)



# The School Community

---

**WHY NO HYPHEN?**



REGION 6  
Georgia  
North Carolina  
South Carolina

# What is a school community?

---

A “school community” consists of the people intimately associated with a school—students, their families, teachers, administrators, school staff, and volunteers—bound together by their common interest in the students served by the school.

Community of the school



# The School Community

## Building Blocks



Shared Leadership



Goals and Roles



Communication



Education



Connection



Continuous Improvement

# SchoolCommunityNetwork.Org

---

[schoolcommunitynetwork.org/](http://schoolcommunitynetwork.org/)

[schoolcommunitynetwork.org/downloads/FACEHandbook.pdf](http://schoolcommunitynetwork.org/downloads/FACEHandbook.pdf)





# Reciprocal Learning Environment

WHAT THE HECK IS IT?

# Reciprocal Learning Environment

---

[Adi.org/rural](http://Adi.org/rural)

[Adi.org/rural/Reciprocal\\_Learning\\_Environment.pdf](http://Adi.org/rural/Reciprocal_Learning_Environment.pdf)



REGION 6  
Georgia  
North Carolina  
South Carolina

# Reciprocal Learning Environment

---

## Reciprocal learning environment

- Begins in the classroom and radiates out. Does not mean that the process can't be fostered by a team of teachers or that the principal can't play a big role in supporting teachers and teams.
- Extending the classroom community to embrace families; listening to them, learning from them, teaching them.
  - Patricia Edwards - story I.

Relational suasion-The teacher's ability to influence students in beneficial ways because of the strength of the relationship.



# Reciprocal Classroom

## Nurture Relationships

- Be a “warm demander
- Explicitly teach social/emotional skills
- Get real (Identification, Authenticity, Empathy, Trust)

## Practice Reciprocity

- Exalt a community of learners
- Create a classroom culture (Culture is a mix of a group’s values, beliefs, traditions, customs, and rituals.)
- Teach each other
- Embrace families

## Leverage Cultural Responsiveness

- Bridge cultural referents
- Use story

# Resources for You

---

**School Community Resources** – [www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org](http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org)

**Rural Resources** – [www.adi.org/rural](http://www.adi.org/rural)

**Contact Sam Redding at:** [sredding@adi.org](mailto:sredding@adi.org)



REGION 6  
Georgia  
North Carolina  
South Carolina