



NATIONAL  
DROPOUT  
PREVENTION  
CENTER/NETWORK

# NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 25 NUMBER 3

## R U R A L I S S U E S

THIS EDITION OF THE *NATIONAL DROPOUT PREVENTION CENTER/NETWORK NEWSLETTER* FOCUSES ON DROPOUT PREVENTION IN RURAL SCHOOLS, PRESENTING PROGRAM PROFILES FROM MAINE AND MISSISSIPPI AS WELL AS RURAL POLICY MATTERS AND A REPORT ON A NATIONWIDE INITIATIVE FOCUSED ON RURAL STATES. BELOW, DR. JAY SMINK DISCUSSES HOW PLANNING IS IMPORTANT FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, AND HOW RURAL SCHOOLS IN PARTICULAR SHOULD CONSIDER ISSUES UNIQUE TO THEIR COMMUNITIES AND CULTURES.



The use of effective planning techniques and implementation procedures for dropout prevention interventions are necessary for solving the dropout issue in the rural schools, and effective planning leads to successful programs. Program solutions are often found in databases such as NDPC/N's Model Programs Database, which includes appropriate sets of intervention activities, instructional practices, and management tasks.

First, however, a school improvement process must clearly define the dropout issue and present a guide for the development of an appropriate implementation plan. School and community leaders may conduct their own self-analysis of the dropout issue, or in rural areas with limited staff, school districts may engage an external professional organization to complete the analysis and create the plan.

The dropout prevention plan should ultimately provide a guide for immediate actions in a school culture of continuous improvement—with an emphasis on improving student academic achievement and increasing the graduation rate.

Regardless of the planning approach used, the process and specific steps are similar. A framework with guidelines for data use in a school improvement process is offered here.

### Using Data for Planning Interventions

Typically, the planning process involves analysis of local data from multiple sources, including existing school-based

or district-level information systems, site interviews, and professional observations. The planning process should be guided by a local action team with representatives from the school, district, and community. At a minimum, data collection and analyses should focus on student demographics, academic performance, attendance and discipline; administrative policies; school resources; curriculum offerings; school climate; and facilities.

Beyond the typical data found in educational information systems, it is critical to collect additional qualitative school and community data about situations that put local youth at risk. At a minimum, on-site observations and professional interviews should reveal varied perspectives and practices related to multiple critical areas, including: school priorities, classroom instructional practices, professional development, school leadership, community partnerships, parent involvement, and availability of educational options.

The approach used by most districts is to form school leadership teams that use web-based data and research-based practices to guide improvement efforts. The data elements noted previously are among the most critical elements and indicators collected and analyzed by local teams.

Many rural districts also respond to issues facing populations, such as immigrant students or Native American learners. Many of these students find public schools incompatible with their cultures and languages. Consequently, these leadership teams must focus on reviewing student data

in order to develop programs and practices to address the critical issues facing specific populations.

### Using Data for Planning Implementation

The local district action team is the primary consumer of the data and information. The team uses the information to develop action plans based on local goals, resources, and conditions.

The planning outcome of the school improvement process is to recommend research-based solutions and intervention strategies such as professional development activities. The ultimate goal is to design a comprehensive dropout prevention plan that addresses each school dropout issue. Rural school districts with culture and capacity to conduct self-directed and continuous improvement processes—guided by evidence-based decision making—are most likely to have successful plan implementation.

Solving the dropout issue requires a multiple-step planning and implementation model. The School Improvement Process table (see page 2) presents generic steps and action categories required by effective program planners in a typical school improvement effort, and can be customized for specific local applications. The NDPC/N can provide more information and details for planning solutions for communities and school districts.

—Jay Smink, DEd  
Retired Executive Director  
National Dropout Prevention Center  
Professor Emeritus, Clemson University

# Conference to Highlight Rural Dropout Prevention Project

A national effort to focus on school dropout in rural states in the U.S. will be highlighted at the upcoming 2015 National Dropout Prevention Network Conference taking place October 25-28 in San Antonio, TX.

Educators and state officials representing Alaska, Arkansas, Iowa, Maine, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming, along with the U.S. Department of Education (US ED), Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, will share results of a recent rural dropout prevention technical assistance program conducted with funding from the US ED. The project, part of US ED's High School Graduation Initiative (HSGI), collaborated with states with large percentages of school districts classified as rural and remote.

According to project researchers, 57% of all operating regular school districts in the U.S. are in rural areas, and more than one fifth of those have higher than average dropout rates. Public schools in rural areas enroll approximately 12 million students, and one in four of those students fail to graduate from high school in rural U.S.

The San Antonio conference will feature, breakout sessions focusing on each of the 14 states, and a special general session on the overall project. "The rural dropout prevention sessions with the states and the US ED are among the most highly anticipated events at our conference," said John Gailer, NDPC/N Assistant Director for Programs and Outreach. "Dropout prevention in

rural areas has unique challenges of its own, and prevention and recovery programs, interventions, and technical assistance for schools and districts in remote locations is of extreme importance."

The US ED awarded the rural dropout prevention project to Manhattan Strategy Group, which executed the project with assistance from the American Institutes for Research, the National Dropout Prevention Network, and Clemson Broadcast Productions. Project deliverables included producing videos focusing on dropout prevention from each state's perspective. The videos focus on dropout prevention strategies used, or challenges faced, specific each district.

Rural dropout issues are varied, but topics highlighted in the videos include school and community collaboration, alternative education, nontraditional rural partnerships, and the development of college and

career pathways. All of the videos will be made available by the US ED for online viewing at the end of the project.

"The videos were created as professional development and technical assistance tools and can be used not only by the participating states, but also by others wishing to replicate the strategies they illustrate," said Dr. Sandy Addis, NDPC/N Director.

A special general session featuring the US ED rural dropout prevention technical assistance project is scheduled for 1:00 p.m., Monday, October 26, 2015, at the National Dropout Prevention Network annual conference. Breakout sessions for each state are scheduled across the two and a half day conference. For additional information regarding the conference, or to register, visit [www.dropoutprevention.org/conferences](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/conferences).

*School Improvement Process table (continued from page 1).*

School Improvement Process	
Planning and Implementation	Sample Categories of Actions
1. Study the situation	Review academic performance, behavior, and discipline issues
2. Recognize the main issues	Identify focus areas, e.g., attendance, discipline, or academics
3. Develop a plan of action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Identify potential solutions</li> <li>b. Select feasible solutions</li> <li>c. Review funds needed for solutions</li> </ul>	Create a list of possible solutions, e.g., parent engagement, mentoring, or behavior modification programs Focus first on interventions likely to succeed such as mentoring Adjust regular school budget to support the program and/or seek grants from external sources
4. Implement the solutions (interventions)	Initiate actions, e.g., select staff, train mentors, secure resources, etc.
5. Monitor and evaluate progress	Collect and analyze data
6. Modify and continue implementing interventions	Continue interventions with changes
7. Analyze data and proceed, guided by three options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Continue implementation of interventions</li> <li>b. Modify as needed</li> <li>c. Terminate the implementation</li> </ul>	Continue as planned Modify tasks and continue Cease the intervention while saving all the positive components



The *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network Newsletter* is published quarterly by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Your comments are always welcome.

Phone: 864-656-2599  
Email: [ndpc@clemson.edu](mailto:ndpc@clemson.edu)  
Web: [www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org)

## Editorial Staff

Bob Collins, Network Board Chair  
Sandy Addis, Executive Director  
Editors: Mark R. Cheatham, Cairen Withington  
Editorial Assistant: Peg Chrestman

## NDPN Welcomes Three New Partners

■ BrightBytes, ViziTech USA, and Catapult Learning have joined NDPN's recently launched school service partnership program, an alliance of companies committed to reducing the nation's dropout rate, and ensuring that students graduate from high school ready for college or career. The new additions bring the program's membership to five, joining AdvancePath Academics and WIN Learning.



BrightBytes, located in San Francisco, CA, is a data analytics organization that is a global leader in improving student achievement through the use of technology and data analysis.



ViziTech USA, based in Eatonton, GA, is a state-of-the-art training and education company, specializing in 3D and interactive/augmented reality learning programs and technology for training and education needs.

## Catapult Learning

Catapult Learning in Camden, NJ, provides innovative, technology-enabled K-12 programs to over 500 school districts, including 18 of the 20 largest Title I districts in the country.

"We are pleased to have BrightBytes, ViziTech USA, and Catapult Learning as members of our partnership program," said Sandy Addis, Director of NDPC/N. "Although their businesses are distinct, each of these companies shares our commitment to combatting dropout, and each of these partners demonstrates this commitment in outreach and day-to-day operations. The growth of the Network's partnership program is ongoing, and we will continue to seek out partners whose resources contribute to the critical effort of dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery."

## Solutions to the Dropout Crisis

■ Join us at 3:30 p.m., ET, on the second Tuesday of each month for *Solutions to the Dropout Crisis*. Upcoming guests (subject to change) for this free, hour-long professional development webcast include:

**October 13**—Director Amber Lange and Assistant Director Jason Combs of the Emerging Scholars Program at Clemson University will discuss how the program has helped disadvantaged students prepare for college and a brighter future.

**November 10**—Dr. Cassie Quigley, assistant professor of science education, and Dr. Danielle Herro, assistant professor of digital media and learning, both of Clemson University, discuss attracting and retaining a diverse STEM workforce. To view *Solutions*, link to [www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast)



## NDPN Receives Toyota USA Foundation Grant

■ Toyota USA Foundation has selected the National Dropout Prevention Network as the grantee for a three-year, multistate project that will provide high school students career-focused education in the midst of the country's growing need for more skilled workers in the manufacturing industry. The \$1.5 million grant is for the design and execution of the "Career-Ready System for High School Students," which is expected to impact up to 24,000 students in New York, Kentucky, and Mississippi.

**We hope to see you in San Antonio!**

**Register now at [www.dropoutprevention.org/conferences](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/conferences)**



**Save the Dates**





# Investigating Dropout Risk Factors in a Rural Maine School District

by Emily Bley

RSU #4 is a rural school district serving three small towns in central Maine. Located just north of the state's second largest urban area of Lewiston/Auburn with about 100,000 people, the district's population is 10,116. The district has five schools serving 1,202 students, and in recent years, has had a high school dropout rate close to 30%—much too high!

This summer, the Maine Department of Education (DOE) hosted a two-day dropout prevention planning workshop, staffed by the Maine DOE Dropout Prevention Director, Jacinda Goodwin, and led by the NDPC/N. Our district was invited and asked to bring any data we felt would be useful to the training. Guidance counselor Melissa Gagnon suggested we read all of the cumulative files of previous dropouts to see what might emerge (classic qualitative research). We didn't know what we were looking for, but we felt that we couldn't create effective interventions until we had a better idea of an RSU #4 dropout's profile. We began with the most recent three years. It was tedious work to go through every piece of paper in 90 cumulative files. We analyzed gender; attendance; the grade in which the student withdrew, or didn't return the following year; total credits versus graduation requirements; number of transfers between districts; retentions; grade promotions without all requirements; alternative education program, special education, Title I, or 504 services; and other factors, such as having experienced abuse, neglect, mental illness, or the criminal justice system, etc. (Beginning this year we will add discipline histories.)

We thought that truancy would be the leading indicator, but to our surprise, the greatest dropout predictor by far was having transferred from one school district to another. For the 2012-13 school year, the rate of multiple transfers was 64%. For the 2013-14 school year, the rate was 70%. The findings made sense: In high school, transfer students often lose ground

due to differences in school district graduation requirements and also class offerings.

We got to work on interventions to help these students be more successful. I asked my daughter, a high school student, what the hardest thing for a new student is on day one. She said, "Lunch—duh!" In addition to being the Clinical Social Worker at Oak Hill High School, I am the McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison, chair of the Dropout Prevention Committee, and an advisor to our Civil Rights Team (CRT). I went to my CRT members and asked what they thought we could do to help new students with the lunch dilemma. One enthusiastic student said, "Well, we're the CRT; we should be the welcoming committee!" And so, our "lunch buddy" program began. Guidance lets me know in advance when a transfer student is starting. I compare his/her schedule to CRT members' schedules to identify a "lunch buddy." I try to meet with every transfer student on the first day, and during that time see if they'd like a lunch buddy. The answer is usually yes. The effort has grown past the CRT, and it is now part of the school culture to approach a new student as soon as they enter the lobby. There is sometimes competition to see who will take the new person under his/her wing. We've also grown the culture of

our staff so that they, too, interact with students on a more personal level.

Today, our transfer students often comment on how our school is the friendliest they've ever attended. And it is not unusual for transfer students to find a way to stay in our district so that they can graduate here, even when their families have moved.

We remain committed to continuing data collection each year, despite the amount of work it takes. Since increasing our services to transfer students, our dropout rate has fallen closer to 10%—a huge improvement. Similar data were shown at the DOE and NDPC/N training event, and we were very pleased to see that RSU #4 had among the sharpest declines in dropout rates and highest percentage increases in graduation rates of districts in attendance.

Of course, having any dropout is not good, but we seem to be on the right track. I strongly encourage other districts to review their cumulative files with a fine-toothed comb to get a better picture of who is dropping out—and why—so that they can create specialized strategies to reduce the number of students dropping out.

—Emily Bley, LCSW  
McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison for RSU #4  
Chair of the Dropout Prevention Committee



Members of the civil rights team changed the school climate to be more welcoming to transfer students. (Photo credit: David Maher/RSU #4)

# Dual Enrollment in a Rural School District

by Darron Edwards

In fall 2013, as the newly appointed Superintendent of Education of the West Tallahatchie School District in Mississippi, I envisioned all students at every grade level in the district being equipped with college and career readiness skills. Then, as the district began to develop a new strategic five-year plan, related goals began to surface. A new goal of graduating all students on time every year became the district's top priority. The West Tallahatchie School District's long-term goals included increasing the district's graduation rate, decreasing the district's dropout rate, and increasing parental involvement. My transformational vision and ultimately my number one priority became to graduate all students on time and to have all graduating students attend either a 2-year or 4-year college. My plan included immediately implementing a process emphasizing college and career readiness standards and strengthening the horizontal ties with a local community college. We were bolstered in our resolve by President Barack Obama's statement from a few years earlier that "in the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience." (See excerpts of the President's speech on the American Graduation Initiative at [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/excerpts-presidents-remarks-warren-michigan-and-fact-sheet-american-graduation-init](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/excerpts-presidents-remarks-warren-michigan-and-fact-sheet-american-graduation-init))

The first step to bringing rigorous college/career standards and a higher achieving environment to West Tallahatchie School District was to meticulously analyze the district's dual enrollment program. Dual enrollment programs are designed to provide high school students with more accelerated learning opportunities through higher education classes. The dual enrollment program is designed to allow high school students early access to college courses. Students earn both college credit and high school credit and are challenged through a more rigorous curriculum in a collegiate setting. A dual enrollment program for students was needed in our district to create an environment that would prepare our students pathways to

college. The greater benefit of the dual enrollment program would enhance stronger academic foundations for success in their future. A dual enrollment program simultaneously prepares students for college while boosting their grade point averages and college entrance examination scores respectively. Recent research has found that properly implemented dual enrollment programs significantly increase high school graduation rates. In addition, research has shown that students participating in dual enrollment programs are more likely to attain associate degrees, bachelor degrees, or even higher. Dual enrollment programs grant students the opportunity to gain early college credits and develop their college/career skills, both academically and nonacademically for post-secondary achievement.

In fall 2013 only three students in the district were participating in locally offered dual enrollment programs. These students were responsible for their own transportation, tuition, books, and materials. After a thorough examination of the program, it was evident that another course of action was needed. I set up a meeting with Dr. Valmadge Towner, President of Coahoma Community College, to discuss a potential partnership with West Tallahatchie School District. President Towner stated clearly, "Let's make this partnership better for the students in West Tallahatchie School District." This commitment brought relief to our students and parents of the burden of paying for books, materials, and costly transportation. The West Tallahatchie School District decided to invest our money in our students' futures by absorbing all costs for all dual enrollment participating students.

At the beginning of the process, our data showed that students in the past who graduated from West Tallahatchie High



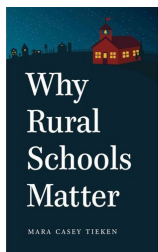
Christopher Furdge (center), Principal, West Tallahatchie High School, Webb, MS, counsels students earning dual credits at both the high school and the local community college. (Photo credit: Jeff Kilpatrick)

School did not tend to attend college. Moreover, the district struggles with both below average graduation rates and above average dropout rates. Aiming for increases in college attendance has been an ambitious endeavor.

However, during spring 2014, enrollment in dual enrollment programs in the district increased from three students to 26 students. The partnership with Coahoma Community College continued to blossom during the fall of 2014 and the enrollment increased again from 26 to 31 students. More recently during spring 2015, the enrollment numbers rose to 38 students in the dual enrollment program. The total enrollment in this new initiative over the three semesters so far is almost 100 students. Academically, all students enrolled during this period earned a B or above in every class. According to Coahoma Community College's final data showing spring 2015 enrollment in dual enrollment programs, West Tallahatchie made up more than 20% of the college's dual enrollment. Presently, we have more than 50 students enrolled in the dual enrollment program for the fall 2015 semester. This progression is definitely one step closer to achieving our district goal of graduating all students on time as well as ensuring that all graduating students are college and career ready.

—Darron Edwards, PhD  
Superintendent  
West Tallahatchie School District

## BOOK REVIEW



*Why Rural Schools Matter.* (2014). Mara Casey Ticken, The University of North Carolina Press. [ISBN: 978-4696-1848-7, paperback; ISBN: 978-1-9646-1849-4, e-book]

There are a lot of myths about rural America. It is probably no surprise that some 97% of the land in the United States is located in nonmetropolitan areas. It might be a bit more surprising to learn that more than 50 million people live in rural America. Few would probably guess that the population of rural America has been relatively stable for years, and that it is not declining.

Mara Ticken's book, *Why Rural Schools Matter*, takes up yet another myth concerning rural education and that is the notion that rural places are ethnically homogenous, and essentially White enclaves in a diversifying nation. It is probably not going too far to say that the experience of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other minorities who have built this nation have been marginal to the mythic narrative of the frontier, the small farm, and other central foundational rural tropes.

Ticken's analysis of two schools in rural Arkansas tells the story of communities that evolved quite differently in the years following the official integration of schools. One community provides the story of an imperfect yet functional integration of Black and White citizens who rally around their more or less integrated school. The other community has experienced complete "White flight," and the school has come to represent a rural version of the resegregation of schools that has become alarmingly common in many urban areas. Ironically, it is the policy of desegregation itself that seems to have created the conditions of "White flight." Yet, at the same time, the politics of school desegregation in this rural community has galvanized the voice of Black citizens who now challenge educational inequality more forcefully than ever before. Schools create communities, but not in uniform ways.

The title of Ticken's book is dual-edged. Rural schools "matter" for all of the familiar reasons. They matter because in rural places they are the "heart" of the community representing (for better and worse) community values and social capital. At the same time though, they also matter in the sense that small rural schools represent microcosms of key American political dilemmas such as those arising from Brown vs. the Board of Education. Rural schools are not places of escape from the complexity of contemporary American social and political problems. On the contrary, they are places that reflect, in locally specific ways, how these politics play out in a diverse rural heartland that is every bit as rife with problems, and full of promise, as any city.

Ticken's book is a highly readable, sensitive, theoretically and methodologically sophisticated analysis which is all too rare for books in rural education. While Ticken is invested in her research, and the communities in which she worked, the analysis seldom strays into nostalgia or one-sided sentiment.

—Michael Corbett  
Professor of Rural and Regional Education  
University of Tasmania

## RESOURCES

*Making Rural Education Work for Our Children and Our Future*, Rural Education National Forum and Battelle for Kids, 2014  
<http://www.battelleforkids.org/docs/default-source/publications/making-rural-education-work-for-our-children-and-our-future.pdf>

*Promoting Learning in Rural Schools*, Sam Redding, Herbert J. Walberg, Center on Innovation & Improvement, 2012  
[http://www.adi.org/about/downloads/Promoting\\_Learning\\_in\\_Rural\\_Schools.pdf](http://www.adi.org/about/downloads/Promoting_Learning_in_Rural_Schools.pdf)

*The Status of Rural Education*, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, National Center for Education Statistics.  
[http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_tla.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tla.asp)

*Family-School Connections in Rural Educational Settings: A Systematic Review of the Empirical Literature*, Carrie A. Semke, Susan M. Sheridan, National Center for Research on Rural Education, 2011  
[http://r2ed.unl.edu/workingpapers/2011/2011\\_1\\_Semke\\_Sheridan.pdf](http://r2ed.unl.edu/workingpapers/2011/2011_1_Semke_Sheridan.pdf)

*Strategies for Improving Out-of-School Programs in Rural Communities*, Ashleigh Collins, Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew, Cassandra Logan, Research to Results Brief: Child Trends, 2008  
[http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/Child\\_Trends-2008\\_05\\_05\\_RB\\_RuralOST.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/Child_Trends-2008_05_05_RB_RuralOST.pdf)

U.S. Department of Education  
High School Graduation Initiative also known as School Dropout Prevention Program  
<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/dropout/index.html>

## EVENTS

March 9-12, 2016 Las Vegas, NV  
2016 American Council on Rural Special Education Annual Conference, *The High Stakes Game: Improving Student Outcomes for Rural and Urban Schools*  
[acres-sped.org/conference](http://acres-sped.org/conference)

Sept. 15-16, 2016 Rome, Italy  
18th International Conference on Rural Education and Information Technology  
<https://www.waset.org>



# A Closer Look at the Rural Dropout Challenge

by Hobart L. Harmon

Today, most Americans have little understanding of living and working in a rural place. Conversations with grandparents may reveal the “good old days” where life was slower and more neighborly. A sense of place was guided by traditional values of independence, religious beliefs, a strong regard for common sense, and a work ethic associated with farming/ranching or jobs tied to the natural environment (e.g., forestry and mining). A person might work at the mill, a manufacturing facility, the hospital, a small store, the bank, or in the school system—for a lifetime. One’s choice of hobbies was greatly influenced by a desire to be in the outdoors, among the fields, trees, nature, and open spaces. And graduating from high school and going to college were not the only paths to the “good life.”

Public schools served an important function in the lives of students, their families, and their communities. But success on a test and global competitiveness were far removed as “the reasons” for supporting public education and school facilities. Few rural residents thought their life was ruined if they did not prepare for a job in some STEM field. As Princeton University professor Robert Wuthnow (2013) found in his study of small town America, most people who live in small towns and rural places have decided that pursuing the American dream of a great “career” means also choosing to live in an urban place, where such opportunities and rewards exist. Living in a rural place is more about family, friends, and a quality of life consistent with having a sense of place in a community.

## Rural Dropouts

Addressing the dropout challenge in rural America consequently requires knowing both why students drop out and the context that surrounds the students and their families’ way of life. In their book about a small place in Iowa, Carr and Kefalas (2009) note that a school system and community may be vastly underserving students who choose to stay in a rural place, while assuming they are helping the best and brightest students to fulfill the middle-class American dream. This educational strategy is “hollowing out” communities in rural America. One might question if such an educational strategy is

also overlooking the most significant evidence-based solution to address a dropout problem: family engagement (Chappell, O’Connor, Withington, & Stegelin, 2015).

Youth in rural school settings may drop out of school for numerous reasons. These include uncertainty about the need to move away from their home communities and family for work or college. A good-paying job opportunity that requires minimum formal education may increase dropping out, especially if the rural culture values work over education. Some students drop out because they can’t get along with a teacher, or they find instruction nonrelevant, or experience an unsupportive school climate. Personal reasons may include pregnancy, marriage, disability, and illness. Not being raised in a two-parent home increases the risk of dropping out.

One in four children in rural America live in poverty (McGranahan, 2015). Counties most vulnerable to child poverty are those with a high proportion of young adults without a high school diploma and a high proportion of children in single-parent families with low levels of education. Counties with many non-high school graduates among their young adults also tend to have high proportions with only a high school diploma, and lower proportions with a college degree.

Interviews of personnel in 10 Colorado rural school districts by researchers (Tombari, Andrews, Gallinati, & Seeley, 2009) at the National Center for School Engagement revealed students dropped out because of involvement with drugs and alcohol, high-poverty levels, family instability, uninvolved parents, and student behavioral issues.

## Taking Action

Public schools in the U.S. enroll more than 12 million students. More than half of regular school districts and about one third of all public schools are in rural areas (Kena, et al., 2014). Recent work at the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network reveals 37% of all counties in the U.S. have one or more rural school districts with a graduation rate that is below the national average. Many of these counties are located in certain geographic regions of the U.S., and serve high concentrations of impoverished ethnic

populations (e.g., African American, Alaska Native, American Indian, Appalachian poor white, Hispanic). Finding a solution to the dropout challenge will mean understanding social, economic, and cultural issues associated with the school’s rural context. In these counties, education policymakers and practitioners, in partnership with parents and community leaders, need to take a closer look.

—Hobart L. Harmon Co-Director  
Rural Math Excel Partnership  
Virginia Advanced Study Strategies  
hharmon@shentel.net

## References

- Carr, P. J., & Kefalas, M. J. (2009). *Hollowing out the middle: The rural brain drain and what it means for America*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Chappell, S. L., O’Connor, P., Withington, C., & Stegelin, D. A. (2015, April). *A meta-analysis of dropout prevention outcomes and strategies*. (A Technical Report in Collaboration with The Center for Educational Partnerships at Old Dominion University). Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University. Retrieved from
- Kena, G., Aud, S., Johnson, F., Wang, X., Zhang, J., Rathbun, . . . Kristapovich, P. (2014). *The condition of education 2014* (NCES 2014-083). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>
- McGranahan, D. (2015, July). Understanding the geography of growth in rural child poverty. *Amber Waves*. Retrieved from [http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2015-july/understanding-the-geography-of-growth-in-rural-child-poverty.aspx#VbZRB\\_IViko](http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2015-july/understanding-the-geography-of-growth-in-rural-child-poverty.aspx#VbZRB_IViko)
- Tombari, M., Andrews, A., Gallinati, T., & Seeley, K. (October 2009). *School dropouts in rural Colorado school districts*. Pueblo, CO: National Center for Student Engagement. Retrieved from <http://www.coloradokids.org/data/publications/pastpublications.html>
- Wuthnow, R. (2013). *Small-town America: Finding community, shaping the future*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

## VIEWPOINT

The following viewpoint comes from Jacinda Goodwin, Program Coordinator for Maine's Office of Truancy, Dropout, and Alternative Education, Maine Department of Education (DOE), and illustrates one rural state's efforts to increase graduation rates through statewide planning and focus.

Reaching every student, not just some, but all students, is a key priority in Maine's Strategic Plan: Education evolving and involving, ensuring support and success for all learners.

To that end, Maine legislature established a truancy, dropout, and alternative education (TDAE) advisory committee to advise on state and local policies and programs related to TDAE across the state. The committee of 15 provides a broad perspective. They are carefully chosen based on their wisdom, tenacity, passion, and proactive thinking; they are selected by the Education Commissioner; and they repre-

sent various backgrounds, such as school leadership, counseling, teaching, other state agencies, alternative learning settings, and the business community.

The TDAE committee is tackling aggressive goals, meeting monthly, using a variety of variables and data points to make recommendations, providing professional development, enhancing data collection, and assisting local districts in drafting local dropout policy.

Schools are required by statute to convene a dropout prevention committee and to develop a dropout prevention plan (we're now collecting data on who is doing what), and when schools reach out for help, the TDAE reaches out to the national experts seeking the tools as to how to go about beginning to develop proactive dropout prevention plans. But the work involves more than a plan or policy, it involves an understanding and a view of how all the pieces work together to ultimately support

Maine's most at-risk youth before they drop out. The TDAE committee creates synergy and a platform to inform needs at the state, local, and even student level.

Through doing this, Maine DOE can begin to craft a Web site and a step-by-step process using videos and other resources including exemplar dropout prevention formats that will support schools in developing dropout prevention plans. With the passion and dedication of a key group of stakeholders focusing on what is in the best interest of Maine's at-risk youth, and support of Maine DOE's TDAE (backed by legislation), Maine continues with this formative work to ensure all learners have the opportunity to be successful. Maine's education is evolving and involving, to ensure support and success for all learners.

*—Jacinda Goodwin  
Truancy, Dropout, Alternative Education and  
McKinney-Vento State Coordinator  
Maine Department of Education*