

Issues Facing Rural Youth: A Compendium of Research, Reports, and Public Opinion Polls

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Despite the fact that 75% of US counties are classified as non-metropolitan areas, less than a quarter of the total population resides there. The composition of these rural areas is highly homogeneous with non-Hispanic Whites comprising 83% of the population (African Americans, 9.5%; Hispanic, 4%). Of those that are classified as living in non-metropolitan counties about 15% live in poverty.

According to the most recent population surveys, around 20% of those that live in non-metropolitan counties are between the ages of five and seventeen. Approximately 12,777,183 (27.4%) non-metropolitan youth attend public school. Close to 5% of rural youth attend private school. This is compared to 12% in metropolitan areas.

However, rural youth face many problems similar to their counterparts who reside in urban centers.

For example, despite the fact that adolescent birth rates are declining around the nation, birth rates for non-metropolitan females between the ages of 15-19 is only slightly lower than the birth rate for youth in large central metro areas (both are between 54-60 per 1,000 females). Adolescents in rural communities may be at greater risk for pregnancy, negative birth outcomes, and STDs due to the relatively few resources that exist in their communities. Long distances to access resources, transportation and financial difficulties, scheduling problems, and lack of anonymity may prevent many teens from seeking the help they need.

Adolescent smoking is also significantly more prevalent in non-metropolitan counties than in metropolitan counties among adolescents 12-17 years old. According to 1999 data, youth living in central counties of large urban areas had the lowest rates of cigarette use while those who lived in the most rural counties had the highest (19% vs. 11%).

(Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus01.pdf>--Health United States, with Rural and Urban Health Chart book, 2001)

Data from the national American Drug and Alcohol Survey indicates that although overall drug use rates are lower for non-metropolitan youth, the difference is shrinking. (Source: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/drugfree/vledward.htm>. Ruth Edwards, Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use by Youth in Rural Communities).

Similar substance abuse problems plague urban and rural youth alike. However, non-metropolitan youth indicate greater problems from their use of alcohol and higher rates of drinking and driving.

Recent articles have reported that rural areas are at risk for an influx of methamphetamine production and use due to the large open areas that are difficult to patrol and open areas that dissipate odors associated with production.

Suicide rates are higher for males than females regardless of location by almost 15% and highest among males 15 and over who reside in rural settings. (Health United States 2001).

According to the Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, youth who live in rural areas have a higher percentage of instructional rooms (classrooms, computer labs, library/media centers) with access to the Internet than youth who live in the city. (City, 52%; Urban Fringe, 67%; Town, 72%; Rural, 71%).

However, the percentage of households with a computer and modem line are much lower in rural communities than in urban areas (although this varies by income level). (Source: Falling through the Net: A Survey of the “have nots” in Rural and Urban America, US Department of Commerce, Ronald Brown).

Therefore, while rural youth may have access to technology at school, the likelihood of them having access at home is less. This may compromise their ability to learn, experience and master current technology and technological applications.

Yet, students in urban areas are more likely than students in suburban and rural areas to drop out of high school.

This may be due to the significantly lower levels of crime found at rural schools. However, “12-18 year olds were just as vulnerable to serious violent crime and theft at school as were urban students. Away from school, urban and suburban students were more vulnerable to serious violent crime and theft than were rural students.”

In rural areas:

- There are fewer residents to provide necessary services
- Rural areas have fewer than one-half as many physicians providing patient care as in urban areas
- Some areas have 1 physician per 2,000 residents
- Over 100 U.S. communities have no practicing physicians at all
- Death rates for children and youth adults (1-24) are highest in the most rural counties
- Women living in rural counties have the highest levels of obesity
- Death rates for motor vehicle traffic related accidents in most rural counties are over twice as high as the rates in central counties of large metro areas.

The main concerns that rural youth encounter that is specific to living in small communities are the economic and physical barriers that prevent them from receiving the adequate care, services, or resources that is necessary to healthy development.

The expanding role of the Internet could assist in solving some of these issues.

In a national survey released by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (<http://wkkf.org/>), 1,030 of the nation's 7,000 state legislators found wide agreement about the economic development needs of rural areas, with 86 percent of respondents agreeing that people in rural areas have fewer opportunities than those who live in cities or the suburbs. According to the survey, the most serious problems facing rural America are the lack of opportunity for young people (38 percent), the decline of the family farm (31 percent), access to health care (28 percent), low-wage jobs (28 percent), access to quality education (18 percent), overdevelopment and sprawl (14 percent), access to technology (8 percent), access to transportation (8 percent), the breakdown of the family (6 percent), and the environment (5 percent).

Grasscatcher, a free service of NCSL's State Legislatures magazine, featured the following news story Friday, March 11, 2005.

"Rural roads are the deadliest, especially in Southeastern U.S."

(<http://www.stateline.org/live/ViewPage.action?siteNodeId=136&languageId=1&contentId=17917>)

The U.S. Census provides the following data on the number of children and youth who reside in America (<http://census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kprof00-us.pdf>).

Children

Under 5	19,175,798	6.8%
5-9	20,549,505	7.3%
10-14	20,528,072	7.3%
15-19	20,219,890	7.2%

Total youth under 5 through 19--- 80,473,165

Youth 5 – 19 61,297,467

Total U.S. population 281,421,906

Households with individuals under 18 38,022,115 36%

The following facts are excerpted from Building Better Child Care...Building a Better America!!! Cooperative Extension System National Child Care Initiative White Paper. Nancy Valentine, Ed.D. Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Washington, DC. March, 1999.

An estimated 27,000 children under the age of 20 years who live on farmers and ranches are injured each year (Gerberich, Gibson, Gunderson, French, Melton & Erdman, 1991). When added to the number of children who visit or work on non-family farms, the number of injuries has been estimated to exceed 100,000 annually (Miller, 1995).

A report by the National Committee for Childhood Agricultural Injury Prevention (1996), indicates the primary causes of fatal and nonfatal injuries to children on farms include tractors and other farm machinery, livestock, building structures and falls. In addition, children are exposed to environmental hazards such as pesticides, fuel, noxious gases, noise, airborne irritants, and vibrations.

According to Hoppe and Korb (1997), in 1995, 89% of farm operator household income came from off-farm sources, mostly from wages, salaries, and non-farm business.

The recent declines in the population of rural counties have had devastating effects on rural America; for every American child who is seriously at risk in an inner city, there is one rural child equally at risk (Hodgkinson, 1996).

In 1991 there were over 1.7 million children under the age of 19 residing on U.S. farms and ranches and living in households of hired farm workers (Dacquel & Dahmann, 1993; & Oliveria & Cox, 1989). Additionally many children, whose parents are not farmers or farm workers, will visit and work on farms. These children are a high risk for accidents and exposures to environmental hazards. These conditions could result, particularly, if

children do not have adequate adult supervision or are left alone during non-school hours due to the lack of child care programs.

When one considers women who report doing farm work, whether paid or unpaid, and those who work off the farm, approximately 75 percent of farm women are employed. In the national labor market, 53 percent of all women work outside the home (Perry & Ahern, 1994).

In 1991, total household income for farms operated by both the husband and wife, including income from farming and off-farm employment, averaged \$37,000 (Perry & Ahern, 1994).

In 1992, about 185,000 of 2.1 million farm operator households meet economic criteria of limited-opportunity farm operator households (Dismukes, Harwood, & Bently, 1997).

Rogers (1991) found that family circumstances of metro and non-metro children are similar in regard to family size, age and number of siblings, family living arrangements and types of child care arrangements. A slightly larger proportion of non-metro children are cared for by a non-relative in another home (24 percent) than is the case for metro children (20 percent). Conversely, a smaller proportion of non-metro children (25 percent) are cared for in a group setting.

End of excerpts from Building Better Child Care...Building a Better America!!!!

Rural Policy Matters (The Rural School and Community Trust)

Why Rural Matters 2003: The Continuing Need for Every State to Take Action on Rural Education. Elizabeth Beeson Policy Analyst and Marty Strange, Policy Director, Rural School and Community Trust. info@ruraledu.org.

Nearly one in three of America's school-age children attend public schools in rural areas or small towns of fewer than 25,000 people. Yet if you listen to the education policy debate, particularly around the impacts of the new 'No Child Left Behind' law, there is not much about rural schools.

On a Rural Education Priority ranking, 13 states, all in the Deep South, Appalachia, Northern New England and the Great Plains, stand out as the leading states in need of rural education policy attention. In priority order, they are Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky, North Dakota, South Dakota, North Carolina, Arkansas, West Virginia, South Carolina, Louisiana, Tennessee, Montana and Maine. These regions are chronically depressed, suffer large areas of out-migration, and are deeply distressed by changes in the global economy.

Rural School and Community Trust. Youth-Adult Partnerships.
<http://www.ruraledu.org/topics/youthadult.htm>

Across rural America, young people are solving some of the most pressing issues in their communities and their track record is impressive. In partnership with adults, young people have created day care centers, saved wetlands, gathered oral histories from elders, established entrepreneurial businesses that bolster challenged local economies, and testified before town councils and state legislatures on a myriad of civic issues. Their powerful aspirations have the potential to strengthen fragile communities, transform rural public education, inform public policy, and produce skilled leaders for our nation's future.

Connecting Communities and Classrooms. Elaina Loveland. The Rural School and Community Trust. Rural Roots. Volume 3, No. 4. August 2002.
<http://www.ruraledu.org/roots/rr304a.htm>

In the landscape of education reform, connecting communities and schools is an integral part of many diverse approaches to improve K-12 education. Many reform initiatives support an innovative curriculum that moves beyond the traditional classroom to incorporate community involvement into students' academic life.

Though the models are different, they share a belief that K-12 education needs to include real-life experience and use the community as context for learning. This underlying common attitude echoes the words of nineteenth century educator John Dewey:

“From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school, its isolation from life.”
—John Dewey, *School and Society*, in Martin Dworkin, ed., *Dewey on Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1959), p. 76-78.

These models have a common desire for students to view learning as relevant to the world around them, to connect with their community, and in the process, become concerned and contributing citizens of that community. Using community as the context for educational experiences allows students to reach out to the larger world and place real value in their education as they realize that they too, can make a difference in society. And these programs are getting results. Studies cite better student achievement, revitalized teaching, enhanced youth development, increased citizenship and improved quality of life as reasons to support and implement community-connected education programs.

The Rural School and Community Trust. News Release. June 19, 2002.
http://www.ruraledu.org/newsroom/stc_pr.htm. The Rural School and Community Trust praised a new report from “Save the Children”, “America’s Forgotten Children: Child Poverty in Rural America.”

2.5 million children live in poverty in rural America.

One in six children lives below the poverty line, a disproportionate number of poor rural children belong to racial minority groups, and where pockets of extreme and persistent poverty are concentrated in six rural regions of the country: Central Appalachia, the Deep South and Mississippi Delta, the Rio Grande border, the Southwest, the Central Valley of California, and remote American Indian reservations, particularly in the Dakotas. In all of these areas, substandard education is one of the many challenges facing the rural poor.

Issues in the report include:

- There is less money per rural student spent on education. Metropolitan school districts spend a total of \$7,010 per student; rural districts spend \$5,302—more than \$1,700 less.
- There is a higher dropout rates among rural students—20% of rural students drop out, compared to 15% of urban students.
- There is increased school consolidation in rural areas, despite evidence that smaller schools are better, especially for poorer children.
- There is a high incidence of racial segregation in rural school districts, particularly in the rural South.
- There are long school bus rides—sometimes up to three hours each way over rough roads to schools far from home.
- There are few opportunities for rural youth to participate in community service programs.

Our research has shown that small school work, particularly for kids who live in poorer communities,” Rachel B. Tompkins, president, Rural School and Community Trust. “The predictable impacts of poverty on student achievement are reduced—often dramatically—when schools are smaller.”

News Briefs. Rural Roots, Volume 3, Number 3, June 2002.
<http://www.ruraledu.org/roots/rr303d.htm>.

America’s Forgotten Children: Child Poverty in Rural America” a new report from Save the Children offers the following information:

Children in rural America are more likely to live in poverty than are children in urban and suburban areas.

Strategies to help persistently poor rural communities have not been as effective as possible, because they fail to build community infrastructure—an element that urban and suburban communities already have.

Prospects for a poor rural community's children become brighter where there are effective child- and youth-focused organizations, strong local leaders, skilled service providers and well-targeted public and private sector programs focused on improving the lives of children.

The report presents four recommendations to improve rural child poverty:

- Build human capital. Provide incentives to reverse the “brain drain,” train the people who are in the community, and attract people with the skills needed to help serve children.
- Build community institutions. Create and strengthen comprehensive community centers and other places that serve children and youth.
- Build the economic self-sufficiency of families. Ensure that welfare-to-work policies make the needs of children a priority.
- Build and refocus support for pockets of poverty. Target and increase public and private support to reach children in the poorest rural areas.

For the report: <http://www.savethechildren.org>

Rural Poverty at a Glance. USDA, Economic Research Service, Rural Development Research Report Number 100. May 2004. www.ers.usda.gov.

Approximately 2.6 million children living in non-metro areas are poor, constituting 35 percent of the non-metro poverty population.

In 2002, one out of every five children living in non-metro areas was poor.

Since 1985, the child poverty rate in non-metro areas has never fallen below 18 percent.

Almost half (46 percent) of all non-Hispanic Black children living in non-metro areas are poor; 43 percent of non-metro Native American children are poor.

Perkins, D. F. (2000). Key issues facing rural youth. *Rural-Urban Connections Working Papers*. Lincoln, NE: Heartland Center for Leadership Development; and Key Issues Facing Rural Youth. Southern Rural Development Center Series #228. <http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/228.htm>.

The following information was quoted, excerpted, condensed, and/or paraphrased from these two sources:

For America and the world, rapid change is the defining variable of the last decade in the twentieth century. This change has been brought on by the movement from industrial jobs to service jobs, globalization of economy, and the infiltration of technology into the fabric of society. As this nation changes, so too does the face of rural America. These economic and technological changes transform the contexts of people who live in rural areas.

While the 1980's saw out-migration of skilled individuals from rural areas, the 1990's especially since 1995 has seen an increase in the number of college-educated people in-migrating to rural areas. These individuals are spending more time commuting to work into the urban and suburban areas (Aldrich, 1997). This separation of work and residence is increasingly common in small towns and seems to lessen the connection of individuals to place (Aldrich, 1997). The long-distance commuting of parents and individuals decreases the interconnection of people to one another, or in other words, the social capital of rural "bedroom communities."

This decrease in time available for community involvement has several implications:

- Youth are unable to observe first hand the potential career opportunities.
- Youth are less likely to have adult modeling civic responsibility in terms of volunteering and service to a community
- Youth are more likely to have more unsupervised free time now than in years past (Carnegie, 1992; Carnegie, 1995). This unsupervised time generally occurs between the hours of 2 and 6 p.m. This time can be an opportunity for positive development, or a chance for youth to participate in negative activities (Perkins, n.d.; Villaruel et al, 1994).

Hispanics constitute the fastest growing racial-ethnic group in rural America because of the migration of Hispanics into rural America, and that Hispanics, on average, have more children than Whites and Blacks. Traditional rural youth need now, more than ever before, to learn to function in a diverse society. Educational and social systems in rural America will have to transform their operations to address this more diverse rural population.

Rural America is often geographically isolated, making it very difficult for youth and families to have access to the opportunities for skill and competency development that can come from participation in after-school programs for youth, training programs for adults, and social services for both (Weisheit, 1995).

The physical distance between homes and small towns and a lack of public transportation are two major causes of isolation in rural America.

One of the most commonly mentioned crises in rural America is the disappearance of many local gathering spots (Childress, 1993). These spots can be community relation settings where youth can interact with peers and adults.

There are a limited number of programs and opportunities for community connection to occur. There are limited program opportunities in rural settings and also a lack of diverse options.

Opportunities for youth employment, not to mention meaningful employment, are scarce compared to urban and suburban areas (Carnegie, 1995).

Rural school districts suffer high turnover rates of teachers resulting in complete staff turnovers every three years (Lemke, 1994). This turnover is due to geographic isolation, population scarcity, low salaries, and difficulty fitting in with the community (Herzog et al, 1995). From the adolescent's view, the high teacher turnover contributes to a lack of sustained relationships with adults, thereby increasing the isolation and alienation felt by adolescents.

The adolescents in rural schools are directly influenced by the low financial support, because it often means fewer opportunities both academically and programmatically.

National estimates for rural areas show that illicit drug use overall is less prevalent in rural areas than in metropolitan areas, but cigarette use, particularly among youths, is higher in rural areas than in metropolitan areas (Office of Applied Studies, 2000).

Although illicit drug use is higher in metropolitan areas than in rural areas, the introduction of methamphetamines has increased rural youth drug use. Labs are popping up all over the country because meth is easy to produce from chemicals found at pharmacies and hardware stores (McGraw, 1998). The drug is appealing to rural, working-class men, women and their youth. Missouri, Iowa, South Dakota, Kansas and Nebraska are referred to as a high-intensity drug area (Bai, 1997). Teenage drug use has been associated with other problem behaviors in youth such as violence, school failure, and teen pregnancy (see reviews of Dryfoos, 1998; Lerner, 1995).

Another challenge for rural school districts in the increase in problem behaviors among youth, particularly school violence. School violence was once thought of as an urban issue, but now teachers in rural schools report experiences and perceptions about violence similar to their urban counterparts (Ballard et al, 1996).

Rural culture may be characterized by prejudice, ethnocentricity and intolerance to nonconforming ideas (Ballard et al, 1996). These contracting sets of values could very well provide an environment for violence in rural schools.

The majority of rural youth 15 or younger have experimented with alcohol, tobacco, and/or sex (Barrons et al, 1997). There is a myth that rural youth are sheltered from such behaviors; however, research demonstrates that this is not true. For example, gang-related activity has grown three fold in many rural areas (Caldarella et al, 1996).

A poll conducted on a national level found that rural students' top five concerns include education, family issues, war, violence, and the environment (Barrons et al, 1997).

In terms of alcohol use, rural youth's consumption of alcohol is similar to that of urban youth's, and rural youth begin drinking at earlier ages (Cronk et al, 1997).

Rural youth are not sheltered from the socially toxic environment that has been linked to inner city areas. This data provides evidence that rural youth exhibit the same problem behaviors as their urban counterparts and have similar concerns as urban youth.

Community Youth Development has a three-fold definition: (1) purposely creating environments that provide constructive, affirmative, and encouraging relationships that are sustained over time among youth and adults and youth and their peers; (2) providing an array of opportunities that enable youth to build their competencies; and (3) engaging youth as partners in their own development as well as in the development of their communities.

CYD shifts the focus from the individual to the interaction of the individual with the multiple levels of his or her environment (Bogenschneider, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, fostering CYD requires positive supports through such things as community gatherings and programs that are intergenerational, opportunities for skill and competency development through programs and activities, and partnerships with youth and adults that contribute to the community.

Several studies have shown that if young people grow up in communities that promote their positive development they had a better understanding of their own values, often became life-long learners, were actively engaged in their communities, and were more likely to promote the positive well-being of other young people (See Benson, 1997; Benson et al, 1998; Blyth, 1995; McLaughlin, 2000; Scales et al, 1998).

The goals of community youth development are (Lerner & Pittman) characterized by 6 "c's"...Competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, compassion, contributing.

CYD means including youth as *partners* in community mobilization efforts to create environments that both link youth with adults in positive *relationships*, and provide new opportunities for youth to develop *skills*.

The school is an important asset within the CYD framework and for rural communities in general. It has been referred to as the heart of a rural community (Farmer, 1989). The school provides mutual experiences and interests that unite rural community members in sharing common concerns.

In addition, the community provides a large classroom (1) to expand the school's and community's offering, and (2) for making the content being taught more relevant.

As the new technology of options like telecommuting enables youth to return to their local communities, whether or not they do so will depend more on whether they grow up with a sense of belonging and connection to their local community than on the economic opportunities their local community offers.

By enabling youth to contribute their ideas, their competencies, their energies, their compassion and their caring attitudes for current community revitalization as well as in planning for the future, communities are increasing that sense of belonging that is necessary for connection.

“If we adults are truly concerned about the future of our communities, our greatest task is to do the things that will help our children (and youth) learn to enjoy living in their communities... And the best way to help them to love their home towns is to let them become fully involved in making good communities (Nelson, 1995, p. 36).

“Relationships are to youth development what location is to real estate.”—James Comer, M.D., Professor of Child Psychiatry, Yale University School of Medicine

End of Perkins articles.

- Rural America contains 75 % of the nation’s land
- It is home to 17% (or 49 million) of America’s population

*USDA/Economic Research Service: *Measuring Rurality: New Definitions in 2003*

- Although 20% of Americans live in rural areas, only 9% of the nation’s physicians practice in rural areas.

*American Public Health Association

- Rural Hispanics have the highest ratio for dropping out of high school (51%)
- Urban blacks are twice as likely to have college degrees as rural blacks

**Rural Education at a Glance* January 2004 USDA/Economic Research Service

- Half of all Non-metro Native Americans live 50% below the poverty line
- 1 out of every 5 rural children was considered to be “poor”, when just Hispanic and Native American families were studied, the ratio becomes one out of two.
- In most rural areas, 32% of the population resides in low employment counties

**Rural Poverty at a Glance*, Dean Joliffe, July 2004 USDA/Economic Research Service

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- Rural median household income of \$33,601 is far below the metropolitan average of \$45,219

**Rural Areas & the Internet, Internet & American Life, February 2004, Pew Internet & American Life Project*

- Overall Internet usage in rural communities is 15% less than user counterpart in metropolitan areas. That number drops significantly when race is factored in.

**Rural Areas & the Internet, Internet & American Life, February 2004, Pew Internet & American Life Project*

- Rural children beginning kindergarten and first grade have the lowest reading and math scores of all children tested by region. This is considering due to lack of early childhood intervention.

**Rural Children Lag in Early Childhood Education Skills, Charles Devarics, Population Reference Bureau, January 2005*

- Rural families typically earn 48% of what metropolitan workers earn.
- 40% of the above income comes from unearned income, such as Social Security.

**U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis Regional Economic Information System 1990-2000 Census*

- Over one-fifth of agriculture based households have an income of less than \$15,000 annually.
- Rural populations declined by 9%, according to the last Census report.

**Swept Away: Chronic Hardship and Fresh Promise on the Rural Great Plains: Executive Summary, Jon Bailey & Kim Preston, Center for Rural Affairs*

Reinvesting in America – Rural Poverty, Innovative Programs for Addressing Common Community Problems. This Web site contains statistics and links with information about rural communities and rural poverty. The site was funded by a grant from CSREES.

http://www.reinvestinginamerica.org/ria_070.asp

Public Reference Bureau - Child Poverty Remains High for Rural and Small-Town America, by Mark Mather and John Haaga. This article makes statistical comparisons of poverty and income between families in small towns and rural areas and those who live in metropolitan areas.

<http://www.prb.org/Template.cfm?Section=PRB&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=11442>

Public Reference Bureau - Rural Kids Lagging in Health, Education. Contact: Mark Mather. This article discusses findings of 2004 research conducted by the Population Reference Bureau. The article cites many ways that rural youth fare worse than metropolitan youth on indicators of child wellbeing.

<http://www.prb.org/rfdcenter/ruralkidslagginginhlth.htm>

USDA Economics Research Service Briefing Room – Rural Income, poverty, and welfare. This site contains information and links to articles, books, data and research about rural economics and poverty issues.

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/IncomePovertyWelfare/>

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