

Chapter 20

Specialized Educational Leadership for Rural Students Living in Poverty

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ABSTRACT

To serve students living in rural poverty, school leaders must understand intimately the specific challenges that students face. Equally, leaders must embrace and leverage the funds of knowledge and assets that these students, their families, and their communities offer. While these challenges are complex, honoring and leveraging the strengths of rural communities in economic distress provide a pathway for leaders to transform schools into places where rurality is valued and students excel. The authors examine the context of rural students experiencing poverty, describe the characteristics of and challenges faced by rural school leaders, and identify responsive leadership practices. To conclude, the authors exhort policymakers, researchers, and state and district education leaders to cultivate rural school leaders as agents of change.

INTRODUCTION

In an age when stark economic disparities exist and grow even wider between low-income and wealthier families, America's rural student populations arrive at the schoolhouse door with their own sets of unique needs and assets that call for unprecedented and highly specialized school leadership. Given that the majority of U.S. public school students now come from low-income families (Williams, Greenleaf, Barnes, & Scott, 2018) and that rural schools account for approximately one third of all U.S. schools (Hewitt, Schmidt-Davis, & Davis, 2018; Johnson, Showalter, Klein, & Lester, 2014), school leaders who serve

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students from rural areas must be ready to meet the daunting challenges of addressing these students' and their families' basic needs in order to educate them well (Kominiak, 2018). Indeed, rural poverty, as compared to urban poverty, occurs at higher rates, is more likely to be deep poverty (family income falls below half the poverty income threshold), and is more likely to be persistent across generations (Lavalley, 2018; National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2015).

Educating students experiencing rural poverty requires school leaders to understand intimately the specific challenges that these students continually face and the effects of poverty upon education. Equally, leaders must embrace the funds of knowledge and assets that these students, their families, and their communities offer, which school leaders must be able to recognize and then leverage to support student learning. While the challenges associated with poverty and rurality are complex, understanding, honoring, and leveraging the strengths of rural communities in economic distress provide a pathway for leaders to transform schools into places where rurality is valued and where students excel. If education is to remain a primary gateway to overcome poverty and disrupt its seemingly generational, cyclical nature, then highly effective and well-prepared school leaders must be in place to enact transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) within and across rural schools and their communities.

Though we acknowledge some of the unique challenges associated with rurality and rural schools, we intentionally constructed this chapter to expose a wider audience to assets-oriented thinking about rural places, rural inhabitants, and rural schools. By design, this work discourages deficit-based orientations about rural places and people and seeks to inform school and district leaders, policymakers, researchers, and educational leadership preparation personnel about leadership approaches to educate and serve rural students well. Section I examines rurality and rural students experiencing poverty in 21st Century America. Section II draws from research to describe who rural school leaders are and the challenges they face. Section III, which is organized and framed by the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015), focuses on effective leadership practices for high-needs, rural schools. We conclude with a clarion call for policymakers, researchers, and state and district education leaders to center the needs and assets of rural schools and their leaders.

SECTION I: EXAMINING RURALITY AND RURAL SCHOOLS IN 21st CENTURY AMERICA

It is critically important for school leaders, their supervisors, community leaders, and policymakers to understand intimately the unique challenges and barriers that rural communities face in order to generate creative leadership and responsive solutions for rural schools. The adage, "If you've seen one rural school . . . you've seen one rural school," underscores the notion that specific characteristics cannot be generalized across all rural settings. Nonetheless, in this section we identify some common themes and traits associated with rural poverty. Despite the absence of a single, universally accepted definition, *rurality* is typically conceptualized as remote locales where proximity to one's neighbors is often distant and where community-based services can be substantially limited - even non-existent - or otherwise almost inaccessible. As Redding and Walberg (2012) note, rural areas typically have "low population density together with family isolation and community remoteness" (p. 5). Rural places nearly always suffer from a lack of tangible resources and tax-based revenues when compared to urban and suburban areas; this is due, in part, to limited business and industry presence (Hewitt et al., 2018), flat or otherwise floundering economies, and geographical isolation (Versland, 2013).

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Though rural communities are sometimes perceived to be *less than* or even *non-preferred* places of dwelling, rural people and their communities possess inherent and unique assets that allow them to cope with challenging conditions and thrive. Amongst the assets of rural communities are rich natural resources; natural beauty; attachment to place and land; the role of tradition, faith, and family; and social capital through informal networks of church, neighbors, and civic groups (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). It is equally important for district and school-based leaders to recognize that rural communities and their citizens offer unique funds of knowledge that may be drawn upon to enhance meaningful educational opportunities for these students. It is important, therefore, that school-based leaders engage in assets-oriented thinking and creative solution-generation to best meet the needs and challenges of students who live in impoverished and isolated places. This concept is explored throughout this chapter, with a focus placed on efforts to identify and remedy challenges by drawing upon the strengths and assets that rural communities embody.

A Portrait of Rural Students Living in Poverty

Rural poverty, as compared to urban and suburban poverty, is marked by certain characteristics, including employment opportunities concentrated in low-wage industries, lower education levels, inadequate access to childcare, limited transportation services (National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2015), and more limited access to mobile phone and high-speed Internet (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). According to a recent Center for Public Education report, many rural areas typically present with “deep and persistent poverty,” where “child poverty is experienced at higher rates” in rural settings (Lavalley, 2018, p. 4). In fact, over 1/4 of rural children are poor, as compared to 1/5 of urban children (National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2015). Deep child poverty, which is more common in rural than urban communities, is defined in the report as “a situation in which a child’s family income falls below half of the poverty line,” which subsequently “indicates that a family is experiencing severe financial difficulty” (p. 4). Of the 48 counties in the U.S. in which child poverty rates are 50% or higher, 42 are non-metro areas, most of which are in the South (National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2015).

Childhood poverty has been linked consistently and over time to negative educational outcomes, including lower achievement rates, greater academic problems, and lower graduation rates (Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2016), as well as to “deleterious effects on children’s behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and neurophysiological development” (Van Ryzin, Fishbein, & Biglan, 2018, p. 128). Impoverished children present with higher levels of cortisol, the stress hormone (Brown, Anderson, Garnett & Hill, 2019). Related, research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; and household dysfunctions such as mental illness, an incarcerated relative, substance abuse, violence in the home, and divorce (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], n.d.) indicates that acute and chronic stress associated with ACEs is linked to a host of long-term health, educational, and life outcomes (National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services, 2015; Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2016). These include increased likelihood of depression, anxiety, suicide, unintended pregnancy, infectious diseases, chronic disease (such as cancer and diabetes), alcohol and drug abuse, and decreased occupational, income, and educational outcomes (CDC, n.d.), including increased likelihood of dropping out of school (Metzler, Merrick, Klevens, Ports, & Ford, 2017), grade retention, poor attendance, special education placement, and lower achievement test scores (Shern, Blanch, & Steverman, 2016). Poor children are significantly more likely to experience ACEs

than nonpoor children (Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2016) and are almost three times as likely as nonpoor children to experience three or more ACEs (Child Trends, 2019). Indeed: “Being poor is associated with so many childhood adversities that it may be considered an ACE in itself, more pervasive and persistent than all others” (Hughes & Tucker, 2018, p. 124).

Poverty and ACEs, however, are not fatalistic determinants of student educational outcomes. Rather, development is “fundamentally plastic and remarkably complex” and “veers markedly away from simple input–output, deficit-compensation models” (Blair & Raver, 2012, p. 315). Rural school leaders play an important role in providing students with protective factors (Shern, Blanch, & Steverman, 2016) – such as strong teacher-student relationships and psychosocial curricula (social-emotional learning; Van Ryzin et al, 2018) – to help mitigate effects of poverty and trauma. Bold, courageous, and innovative leadership is required from district and school leaders to meet rural students and families where they are. If school leaders fail either to identify or to appropriately respond to students’ social and academic needs, then they shirk the very ethical leadership responsibilities entrusted to them and conscribe student life choices and socioeconomic mobility. School leaders shoulder monumental responsibility to educate poor rural students at high levels and must adopt a *whatever it takes* philosophy (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek, 2004), which may well serve as a rural school leader’s mantra.

Assets of Rural Communities, Families, and Students

Though this section of the chapter has focused thus far upon just some of the challenges that poor rural students often face, it is imperative that leaders recognize and disrupt “rural denigration” (Surface & Theobald, 2014), an historically-rooted notion “that rural schools and communities, indeed, even rural people, are somehow substandard or second-class” (p. 570). School leaders, then, must identify the strengths and assets that rural, economically distressed communities and their students offer and leverage these to promote high quality educational experiences for students. Redding and Walberg (2012) declared “rural schools are advantaged,” providing “abundant social capital,” and honoring “the centrality of the school in community life” (p. 31).

One of the assets of rural communities is small school size:

Schools usually are reflections of the communities in which they are located. And smaller communities are typically places that naturally result in close interpersonal connections, where individuals know, share with, and care for each other. Smaller schools mirror these qualities and reduce student alienation, teacher isolation, and rigid boundaries between the administration and the rest of the staff. We believe the resultant culture of small schools is qualitatively and intrinsically different from that of larger schools and that this closeness permeates all areas of schooling and makes a huge difference for children. (Jimerson, 2006, p. 16)

In small, rural schools, adults know each student by name; there is stronger student and teacher attachment; less competition for sports and leadership roles; and higher extracurricular participation (Surface & Theobald, 2014). Indeed, “small schools have a positive impact on children marginalized by poverty . . . as school size increases, school performance decreases for economically disadvantaged students” (p. 576-577). Additionally, smaller schools can disrupt social barriers that marginalize minority students and foster social integration (Surface & Theobald, 2014).

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Rural people weave their own cultural fabric, one that reflects the characteristics, values, social mores, customs, and traditions situated within a particular setting. Curtin and Cohn (2015) noted that rural settings often “place emphasis on family blood lines, kinship relationships, family preservation, and a cultural emphasis on taking care of kinfolk” (p. 1). Given this, school leaders must invest in building bridges between school and families. Getting to know students well as people and building relationships with their families allow school leaders to develop deep, personalized, and engaging relationships, all of which are grounded in genuine interest and advocacy for students’ needs and which influence the entire culture of the school (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Community-based entities, agencies, and individuals are rural assets, and school leaders can engage these as partners. Lavalley (2018) noted that rural school leaders should capitalize on the expertise that lies within “business owners, skilled professionals, retirees, and other residents of the community” (p. 27). She further suggested that leaders identify from which colleges or universities the majority of their teaching force graduates and form outreach efforts with those particular institutions to provide, for example, high quality professional development for teaching graduates, all of which is aimed at increasing student learning and wellbeing. Establishing partnerships with Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) has the potential to provide vast resources to rural schools, including, but certainly not limited to, engaging in joint research efforts around student and staff needs (Lavalley, 2018); providing distance learning opportunities for students (Redding & Wallberg, 2012); strengthening school leaders’ capacities through enhanced knowledge and specialized skill sets for rural leadership (Hewitt et al., 2018); and instituting co-sponsored efforts to support novice teachers well (Rumley, 2010).

Often, members of rural communities possess a strong sense of pride, belonging, and appreciation for their community and schools (Preston et al., 2013; Tieken, 2014). People who have been reared in rural settings and who have remained there develop a *sense of place* and belongingness. In an extensive literature review regarding concept of *sense of place*, editors Convery, Corsane, and Davis (2012) stated that

places, genius loci, can be thought of as being made of a range of factors which include the topographical, the cosmological and spiritual, the built environment and people’s emotional and psychological engagement with place ... considerations of place include social construction of place, how place meanings develop over time, and how people become attached to places. (p. 2)

It is wise, therefore, for rural educators to capitalize on these assets, including intergenerational connections to land and community. Leaders must recognize the rich funds of knowledge of rural students, who are often apprenticed to knowledge and skills in numerous fields, including agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, mechanics, construction technology, and care of land and other natural resources. These specialized bodies of knowledge and their accompanying skill sets demonstrate that rural students can learn at high levels and master sophisticated content. It is incumbent upon rural school and district leaders, therefore, to employ ingenuity in leveraging rural students’ many strengths and assets and to hold high expectations for rural students experiencing poverty.

SECTION II: RURAL SCHOOL LEADERS

Thus far, we have identified challenges faced by rural students of poverty, as well as the assets and funds of knowledge that rural communities and students present. In this section we shift our focus to an examination of who rural school leaders are, including their characteristics, the challenges they face, and strategies for addressing those challenges.

Principals are important. Of all school-based factors, they are second only to teachers in their influence on student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood, Louise, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) and thus warrant an examination of their characteristics. Demographically, rural principals are less diverse, in terms of race and gender, than their nonrural counterparts (Pendola & Fuller, 2018). They are also paid less (Beesley & Clark, 2015). Rural principals tend to have less experience than their nonrural counterparts, although there are exceptions to this pattern (Beesley & Clark, 2015). Rural principals tend to have lower education attainment, as reflected in fewer post-master's degrees, and less access to professional development than do their nonrural counterparts (Beesley & Clark, 2015). Overall, there are no significant differences between rural and nonrural principals in terms of number of hours worked, but rural principals report having fewer contract days, which suggests that they may be more likely to work on non-contract days. Rural principals report investing less time than their nonrural peers on instructional leadership (serving as lead learner; promoting lifelong learning for students and teachers; providing feedback and professional development to teachers; and using data to inform leadership and instruction), even though they identify it as their most critical responsibility, and they report being overwhelmed by management issues, including discipline/student management (Parson et al., 2016). While rural principals report lower levels of autonomy in school budgets, they cite more influence over curriculum, and interestingly, greater autonomy is associated with higher retention rates of rural principals (Beesley & Clark, 2015).

The rural principalship is a more than a job; it is a lifestyle. Rural principals experience a high level of visibility (Beesley & Clark, 2015) and scrutiny by community members, as well as a lack of, and disregard for, their personal privacy (Preston et al, 2013). In rural communities, the principal's life is the community's business. The principal is "public property" and "on call" (Preston et al., 2013, p. 3) and is expected to be a role model, to interact with the community outside of school hours, and to participate in community events. The principal shoulders the burden of the school as a symbol of community identity (Preston et al, 2013).

Rural school leaders face a number of challenges. Based on their review of the literature, Preston et al. (2013) identified a number of challenges unique to rural school principals, as listed in Figure 1. A common challenge that rural principals face – which is exacerbated at small, rural schools – is that of wearing multiple hats (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Beesley & Clark, 2015; Parson, Hunter, & Kallio, 2016). In rural schools, there is less specialization of role as a function of smaller school sizes and limited resources. As such, the principal's spectrum of responsibilities can be motley and immense:

Principals from small rural schools described responsibilities such as bus driver, teaching classes, directing athletics, filling vending machines, facilities management, activities management, and attendance as major job responsibilities . . . This increase in job roles means there is less opportunity for participatory leadership, in that there are fewer people to involve in the decision-making process. (Parson et al., 2016, p. 75)

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Figure 1. Challenges experienced by rural school principals

Source: This list comes primarily from the work of Preston et al. (2013). Other sources are noted parenthetically in the list.

- Disadvantage when seeking a principalship if no personal-historical connection to the community (need affiliation); once in principalship, met with suspicion if no preexisting personal-historical connection;
- Challenges recruiting qualified teachers and staff (Parson, Hunter, & Kallio, 2016)
- Feelings of isolation (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Beesley & Clark, 2015)
- Difficulty building professional networks;
- Requirement in some districts that principals serve more than one building;
- Fewer administrative supports (e.g., assistant principal, secretary, school treasurer, curriculum specialists; Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Beesley & Clark, 2015; Parson, Hunter, & Kallio, 2016) and thus little capacity to delegate;
- Lack of professional development for rural principals and resources;
- Gender discrimination (marginalization of women applicants for the principalship, especially at the high school level; dismissal of ideas from women principals).

This quote reflects both the myriad duties small, rural school principals take on and also the influence of such roles on the leadership approaches used by principals. Specifically, Parson et al. (2016) point out that rural principals tend to utilize transactional leadership styles (using rewards and punishment to gain compliance) as opposed to participatory (shared decision-making by relevant stakeholders) or distributed leadership (leadership capacity of people across an organization is developed and utilized) and instead yield “sole power” (p. 75). Thus, the leader’s approach may reflect the burden of duties instead of the leader’s philosophical commitments and beliefs about the efficacy of leadership approaches.

Another tension that rural principals face is the need to enact change, especially in response to accountability pressures, in communities that often are unwelcoming to change:

Rural community members tend to be culturally and historically attached to their community . . . In an effort to preserve this sociocultural harmony, rural community members are placed to be apprehensive of change. Because the culture of rural schools reflects the characteristics of the immediate community, the concept of change is often a contentious issue for rural principals. (Preston et al., 2013, p. 7)

As rural principals work to navigate community discomfort with change to improve student learning, they bear the burden – often alone – of extreme accountability pressure, especially in terms of student achievement as measured by state tests:

Standardized testing represents a microcosm of capitalist society as the rich schools (in terms of funding and academic capital) get richer and the poor schools get poorer. Studies have shown that this rural school catch-up issue is taxing on students, teachers, and the leaders of rural schools. (Preston et al., 2013, p. 7)

In addition to accountability pressures that inequitably burden rural principals, they face increased challenges complying with state and federal policy mandates that fail to account for staff or school size (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). Indeed, principals must deal with educational policies devised by state and federal policymakers that are “mostly irrelevant – at best, meaningless to this school and the community that depended upon it; at worst, impossible in their demands and damaging in their effects” (Tieken, 2014, p. 3). Additionally, rural principals must respond to the poverty, underemployment, and other challenges that rural communities face (Beesley & Clark, 2015). Give these difficulties, as well as the

list of challenges in Figure 1, it is no understatement to say that the life of a rural school principal is intense and fraught with challenges.

Despite what seems a daunting amalgam of challenges, there are strategies that rural principals can leverage to address them. Table 1 represents tools identified by Ashton and Duncan (2012) for rural leaders to address professional isolation and loneliness, thrive in a rural community, and handle management duties.

Table 1. Strategies for overcoming common challenges rural principals experiences

Dispelling Isolation and Loneliness	Knowing and Thriving in a Rural Community	Management Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a mentor • Cultivate healthy coping mechanisms (e.g., exercise) • Develop resilience through purpose (reflect and develop a personal mission statement that anchors and guides prioritization) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish key relationships (e.g., site-based leadership team, parent-teacher organization) • Take time to build rapport (e.g., learn student names, visit teachers individually) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infuse school vision into decision-making and prioritization • Communicate vision to parents and community through the local newspaper, radio, and informal grapevine • Use Covey’s Time Quadrant (1989) to prioritize, delegate, and dismiss tasks • Schedule instructional leadership into one’s calendar, including informal observations, coaching teachers, and planning professional development.

Source: (Ashton & Duncan, 2012)

Beyond these strategies, the next section highlights effective leadership practices that will promote rural student learning and wellbeing.

SECTION III: EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES FOR HIGH-NEEDS, RURAL SCHOOLS

Rural school leadership is “multi-faceted, place-conscious, and relationship-dependent” (Preston et al., 2013, p. 7). Section III dives into effective leadership practices for high-needs, rural schools and is structured according to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), which were developed by the National Policy Board for Education Administration (2015). For each standard, we offer strategies that can provide positive traction to enhance student learning and wellbeing specifically for rural school leaders serving high-poverty communities.

Mission, Vision, and Core Values

While it is an expectation in the PSEL standards that principals work with stakeholders to develop and implement a mission, vision, and core values that promote the well-being and academic success of all students, principals in rural schools best serve their students and communities by situating the mission,

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vision, and core values in the assets and heritage of the community. Rural schools are in and of the community. Indeed, “*the school is the community*” (Tieken, 2014, p. 144, emphasis in the original). There is a “reciprocal and symbiotic relationship between school and community” (p. 61). This relationship includes and goes beyond the school serving as a physical center of the community – a gathering place where community happens. It includes and goes beyond the historical ties binding school and community across generations. Rural schools are – in real ways – the economic lifeblood of rural communities, where schools are often the biggest employers and hold important vendor relationships with businesses in the community, such as with the local auto repair business that services busses and the printing shop that produces t-shirts, hats, and hoodies with the school’s name and logo.

Thus, there is a powerful connection between rural school and community. Rural principals must acknowledge this and respect it. Further, rural leaders do best by the students and communities they serve when they recognize and honor community assets and the heritage of rural schools. This recognition can be reflected in the school mission, as exemplified in the mission statement of Sugar Valley Rural Charter School, where even the name of the school proudly announces its rural context:

The mission of the Sugar Valley Rural Charter School is to provide a rural, community-oriented lifelong learning center which both reflects and helps to shape the best of Sugar Valley’s social, cultural and educational heritage. (Sugar Valley Rural Charter School[a], n.d., para. 1)

This mission statement explicitly reflects the school’s rural orientation and embodies the recognition that the school reflects the community and helps to shape it, honoring the best of its heritage. The use of the word “center” implies recognition of the centripetal force of a rural school in its community. Interestingly, this mission statement is from a charter school that opened in 2000 in Pennsylvania and was founded through the efforts of Sugar Valley Concerned Citizens, Inc., a “grass-roots coalition of parents, educators and other community members with two decades of deep and abiding interest in the educational development of Sugar Valley’s children” (Sugar Valley Rural School Charter[b], n.d., para. 3). This suggests that members of the community rose up to take ownership of the school and shape it to reflect, serve, and mold the community. This is an intriguing dynamic, given that choice programs are often seen by rural community members as threats to the traditional neighborhood schools (Tieken, 2014).

As rural principals engage in the process of collaborative vision and mission setting, they will do well to include faculty, staff, parents, community members, and – to the degree that it is developmentally appropriate – students. This process is best carried out by a diverse set of stakeholders who reflect the economic and racial/ethnic diversity of the community, as well as community members who are new to the area and those who have intergenerational ties to the community.

Ethics and Professional Norms

All school leaders must be persons of integrity who are fair and ethical. This can be tricky for rural principals, where ties of family and loyalty are ubiquitous and where everyone seems to know – or be related to – everyone else. These micropolitics can be challenging to navigate, especially in contexts involving discipline, parental concerns, human resources decisions (hiring, promoting/demoting, and firing), and vendor contracts. In economically distressed rural areas, where the school is the economic lifeblood of the community, principals must be especially careful when making decisions that impact individual and organizational finances:

The appearance of impropriety – even when none exists in fact – can weaken the public’s confidence in its government. This problem is particularly troublesome in the context of school administration, for ethical disputes weaken the moral authority school boards need to serve as effective educational leaders and role models for community children. (McFadden, 2000, p. 658)

Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

Principals are responsible for ensuring that all students are treated fairly, respectfully, and with recognition of their culture and heritage language as assets. Further, principals must confront inequitable practices that silence, marginalize, and render students invisible as a function of their race, class, gender/identity, ethnicity, and heritage language. Students in poverty experience inequities in school, typically in the form of reduced expectations, stereotypes, failure to address student learning gaps, invisibility, fewer and lower-quality instructional materials, less qualified teachers, less experienced teachers, and larger class sizes (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Further, students experiencing poverty often have other intersecting marginalized identities, including racial/ethnic and gender identities. In this section, we take up some of these inequities and what principals need to do to disrupt these patterns of institutionalized injustice and re/define rural schools as inclusive places that honor students and serve them respectfully.

Serving Students of Poverty

We discussed the effects of poverty previously. Here we identify strategies that rural principals can leverage to mitigate the effects of childhood poverty. The following are school-level factors that positively impact outcomes for students of poverty from Jensen (2009 & 2019):

- Hold high expectations for all students and provide supports to help them meet *gutsy goals*.
- Support the whole child: Provide wrap-around services to address social, emotional, and health needs of students.
- Use multiple datasets to triangulate and meet student needs.
- Promote collective responsibility: Students in poverty tend to do best in schools in which the adults share accountability for all students.
- Cultivate a growth mindset (belief that success is based on hard work, persistence, dedication, and using effective strategies to develop skills; Dweck, 2006), hope, and optimism.
- Build healthy relationships: Promote caring, empathetic relationships among students, between educators and students, and among teachers.
- Promote an enrichment mindset:

Shift the collective mind-set from “those poor kids” to “our gifted kids.” Stop thinking remediation and start thinking enrichment. The enrichment mind-set means fostering intellectual curiosity, emotional engagement ... [and] complex curriculum and instruction ... maximizing students’ and staff members’ potential, whatever it takes. (Jensen, 2009, p. 94)

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Rural principals have a responsibility to provide professional development to teachers on the characteristics and impact of rural poverty as well as what teachers can do to promote rich learning for poor students, which is the topic of Jensen's 2019 book, *Poor Students, Rich Learning*, which can be used for a schoolwide book study. Additionally, principals must build educator empathy for students experiencing poverty and help them recognize the assets that poor students bring to the schoolhouse. The memoir *The Glass Castle* (and film by the same name) by Jeannette Walls (2005) can serve as a powerful schoolwide book study. While it might be tempting to abdicate responsibility for providing a rich learning experience for students of poverty by claiming that there are no resources available to do so, such a claim overlooks the rich resources available throughout impoverished rural communities. Community asset mapping, as described below, is a process by which educators can recognize, inventory, and leverage assets in rural, poor communities.

Community Asset Mapping

Community asset mapping is a process through which the tangible and intangible resources, skills, and capacities of individuals, organizations, and institutions, as well as the physical structures and natural resources of a place, are identified, inventoried, and mapped (Arriero & Griffin, 2019; Kerka, 2003). Community Asset Mapping is based on the concept of asset-based community development (ABCD), which draws upon an asset – versus deficit – orientation, appreciative inquiry, honoring of social capital, and participatory approaches to change (Kerka, 2003). Educators have the capacity and position to leverage community assets to best serve students, especially those who experience poverty and who are from minoritized groups. To do that, educators must recognize and tap available resources. There are several basic steps (adapted from Arriero & Griffin, 2019; Beaulieu, 2002) to community asset mapping: 1) establish a multidisciplinary team that includes school leadership; 2) list and assess current resources used; 3) search for additional resources by, for example, searching newspapers and community directories; contacting local organizations (libraries, churches, other schools; civic groups; parks and recreation facilities; social service agencies); identifying community businesses; and reaching out to diverse stakeholders, such as parents and community members who are well connected within their affinity groups; 4) reach out to, connect with, and build relationships and partnerships with the community assets identified in Step 3; and 5) mobilize assets in creative ways to serve student needs.

Community asset mapping can be used by educators for a variety of purposes. In one example, counselors from a rural high school used community asset mapping to develop a college and career readiness program for Latinx students and their families called ¡Adelanta! (“forward”). The multisession program honored the dignity, culture, and heritage of Latinx students and their families. Each session began with a family dinner followed by childcare for younger family members and sessions for parents and high school students. The entire program was conducted in Spanish (guest speakers either spoke in Spanish or a translator was on hand), and printed materials were available in Spanish. Raffle tickets were provided to attendees at each session, with a drawing conducted halfway through the program and at the end. The school counselors, who spearheaded the program, credited the program's success to the use of community asset mapping to identify and leverage resources (e.g., for food, childcare, translation services, and raffle items), thus catalyzing existing community assets to serve Latinx students in a way that built skills and encouraged cultural identity and pride (Arriero & Griffin, 2019).

Serving Students Who Have Experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (Aces)

Economic hardship is the most common adverse childhood experience (Sacks, Murphey, and Moore, 2014). Additionally, parent drug use – and the household dysfunction commonly associated with it – can be an adverse childhood experience. Given the raging opioid crisis, and its particular stronghold in rural areas, rural schools invariably serve students who experience such trauma. Nationally, about 46% of children have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (Sacks et al., 2014). Schools can help to mitigate the effects of these ACEs and other forms of trauma. The single most powerful thing that educators can do is to develop a caring, reliable relationship with the child. Additionally, leaders can provide professional development to educators about ACES and work with the School Improvement Team to introduce trauma-informed practices, such as:

- “Instead of looking at how a person is ‘a victim’ or ‘damaged,’ we can view them as a survivor. Focus on what they can do, and not on what they cannot do.” (CPI, 2017, p. 7)
- “Provide consistency, predictability, and choice-making opportunities” (CPI, 2017, p. 7), as well as consistent routines (National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee, 2008).
- Recognize that “even the most disruptive behaviors can be driven by trauma-related anxiety” (National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee, 2008, p. 5). Help students identify de-escalation strategies (e.g., listening to music, breathing exercises, using a weighted vest, writing in a journal) that work for them, and make those strategies available as needed (CPI, 2017).

Serving Students of Color and Diverse Ethnicities

Serving Black Students

Rural schools have an ugly history of racial inequity. Many schools fought – actively and passively – the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* that officially ended desegregation (Cecelski, 1994). Indeed, Cecelski’s (1994) description of the inequities faced by black students during the years of desegregation ring disconcertingly true today as well:

They tracked black children into lower-ability, vocational, and special education classes at disproportionate rates, leading to virtual segregation within many schools . . . Black students also encountered other classroom problems, including hostile attitudes, high rates of suspensions and expulsions, low academic expectations, and little encouragement to prevent them from dropping out. (p. 170)

These types of systemic inequities are often invisible to white rural Americans. Color-blindness – the denial of the role race plays in people’s experiences and treatment – is frequently seen as a virtue and not the propagation of racial inequity. Yet in rurality we find hope: Rural communities are often the sites of the most integrated schools in contemporary America (Tieken, 2014).

To promote racial equity, principals must first themselves be aware of historical and contemporary structural and systemic inequities faced not only by African Americans but by other persons of color as well and then provide opportunities for educators to engage in a journey of wakefulness to these realities. A schoolwide book study of the memoir *Waking Up White* by Debbie Irving (2014) is one way in which to begin this work. Additionally, principals and educators must recognize their own implicit biases, those

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unconscious, automatic associations that humans have about others that affect their thinking, decisions, and actions (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016). Principals may wish to take – and have their faculties/staffs take – an online Implicit Associations test (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>) to help recognize implicit biases and begin dialogue about them. Helpful books on the topic include *Blindspot* by Banaji and Greenwald (2016) and *Whistling Vivaldi* by Claude M. Steele (2010), which explores stereotypes based on implicit biases and how we can address them. Additionally, principals must help teachers cultivate culturally responsive pedagogy, which is described below.

Serving Latinx Students

While rural areas overall have experienced population decline since 2010 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018), an influx of immigrants to rural areas helped offset outmigration (Parker et al., 2018). In fact, Latinx people represent the fastest-growing segment of the rural population (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018). The rural Latinx population increased by 45% from 2000-2010, a rate higher than for any other racial or ethnic group (Lichter, 2012). This growth tends to be concentrated in geographic hot spots around industries such as construction, meatpacking and meat processing (Lichter, 2012), and “in some cases, Latinx in-migration has been an economic godsend that has revitalized local [rural] economies” (Lichter, 2012, p. 11). Nonetheless, for some rural residents, new immigrants are a threat to “cultural or national identity, as well as to traditional or nostalgic ways of rural life” (p. 17).

Rural schools themselves often struggle with shifting demographics, especially in terms of providing culturally sustaining pedagogy that “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 93). Latinx students often have their language and culture ignored by educators and suffer from stereotypes and discrimination (Arriero & Griffin, 2019). Additionally, rural schools are often “ill-equipped to address barriers to academic and personal/social development of Latino children, including English-as-a-second-language needs, immigration status concerns, and working with parents who do not speak English” (Villalba, Brunelli, Orfanedes, 2007, p. 506).

Latinx students have linguistic assets and are often emerging bilinguals. In one North Carolina high school, a new Latino student was empowered by the teacher to provide instruction on Spanish to the class community during brain breaks. The student began by teaching his classmates how to play rock-paper-scissors in Spanish. In this way, the teacher positioned the student as someone with valuable funds of knowledge whose emerging bilingualism is an asset to the class, which in turn built the student’s social capital within the classroom community. Villalba and colleagues (2007) outline school and teacher practices that Latinx parents identify as important: empathy and compassion by teachers; collaboration by the teacher and counselor with parents; teacher encouragement and motivation; patience by teachers and respect for language differences; special programs (e.g., tutoring, after-school programs); extracurricular offerings; translation of important school documents to Spanish; translators for important school events; and provision of needed supplies.

Serving Native American Students

The statistics on educational outcomes for Native American students, who comprise 1% of the population of U.S. schools (Riser-Kositsky, 2019), are alarming:

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Native students perform two to three grade levels below their white peers in reading and mathematics. They are 237 percent more likely to drop out of school and 207 percent more likely to be expelled than white students. For every 100 American Indian/Alaska Native kindergartners, only seven will earn a bachelor's degree, compared to 34 of every 100 white kindergartners. (National Caucus of Native American State Legislators, 2008, p. 5)

Native students sitting in U.S. classrooms carry with them the historic experiences of their people, including acts of genocide (Bird, 2017) in the birth of our nation under the guise of Manifest Destiny and other atrocities perpetrated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, including forced relocation, forced sterilization, and forced assimilation (Glauner, 2001-2002), brutally enacted in part through Indian boarding schools where American Indian children were forcibly removed from their families and stripped of their culture and language (Institute on Community Integration, 2018).

Rural leaders must disrupt the narrative of injustice against native peoples and provide culturally sustaining, equitable schooling to native students. Some of these strategies are the same as mentioned previously: build teacher understanding and empathy regarding the culture, assets, and needs of Indigenous students; cultivate respectful, authentic relationships between educators and students and among students; allow students to work collectively; assess holistically; integrate the cultural practices and history of Native American students into the curriculum; and communicate to families that their part in their children's education matters (Farmer, 2018).

Addressing Gender Marginalization

Rural schools must address other forms of oppression and marginalization as well. There are gender patterns in rural schools that reflect norms from more than half a century ago. In our work with rural schools, enrollment in various career technical tracks is highly gendered: Male students are predominant in trade and industrial education, and female students are predominant in family/consumer sciences. Anachronistic gender patterns appear in the rural principal ranks as well: Females are underrepresented in the rural principalship, especially in high schools (Preston et al., 2013). There is one trend that disrupts traditional gender stereotypes: Rural women outpace men in all education attainment levels (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017). Currently, there is exceedingly little research on gender patterns in rural education. For this reason, it is even more important that principals enact equity audits, discussed below, in their schools to surface and address inequitable gender patterns.

Serving Gender Diverse Students

Increasingly, attention is being paid to ways in which gender identity affects student experiences in school. Rural principals can promote gender inclusive schools by helping adults and students recognize the dimensions of gender: body (anatomy), identity (internal experience of gender and how we name it), gender expression (ways in which we express gender socially through clothing, hair, mannerisms, etc.) and sexuality (feelings of romantic and sexual attraction; Genderspectrum, n.d.).

Schools must be safe spaces for all students, regardless of their gender identity. Given the conservative religious beliefs common in rural areas, it is imperative that principals communicate to students, faculty/staff, parents, and communities that regardless of one's personal or religious beliefs, in school *all students* – regardless of gender identity – will be treated with dignity and be included, safe, and respected.

Equity Audits

Equity audits can be a powerful way to unearth and address inequities not only related to gender/gender identity but also to the marginalization of other minoritized groups, such as those in the preceding sections. Equity audits involve the systematic gathering and analysis of teacher quality data, programmatic data (e.g., special education programs, gifted programs, programs for English Language Learners; advanced coursework programs, such as honors and advanced placement), and achievement data for patterns of inequity, such as the overrepresentation of students of color in suspension data and the underrepresentation of students of color in advanced placement courses. For more information on equity audits and how to conduct them, see Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009), Capper and Young (2015), and Hewitt (2018).

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

There are innumerable tomes dedicated to the topics of instructional leadership for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Here we focus on three most specific to rural schools serving students of poverty: culturally responsive pedagogy, place-based education, and access to curricular opportunities.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) shifts instruction away from assimilation and towards cultural relevance and includes practices such as forming respectful, authentic, caring relationships with students; demonstrating the belief that all students can succeed; making connections between content and students' identities and lived experiences; and teaching students to analyze power and oppression in society (Ladson-Bills, 2009). Ladson-Bills' (2009) *The Dreamkeepers* is a seminal work on culturally responsive pedagogy and could be used for a schoolwide book study. The implementation of CRP serves to support and promote equity and cultural responsiveness, which formed the focus of the preceding section.

Place-Based Education

Place-based education engages students in service projects that “immerse students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, using these as a foundation” for content area learning (Promise of Place, n.d., para. 1). Place-based learning honors the assets of the community, is adaptable to the unique context of a given place, and connects school to kids' lives in relevant ways (Smith, 2002). One example is the *Elwani* project, catalyzed by the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative to integrate Native Alaska knowledge into school curricula (Smith, 2002). Principals can lead the charge for place-based education by providing professional development on the topic and utilizing resources for curriculum, planning, and evaluation of place-based learning provided by Promise of Place (<https://promiseofplace.org/curriculum-planning/curricular-resources>).

Access to Curricular Opportunities

Small, rural schools with limited resources often struggle to provide broad curricular offerings and advanced coursework. Completion of rigorous coursework, like international baccalaureate programs (which are often cost-prohibitive, especially in under-resourced rural areas) and advanced placement

courses is associated with postsecondary success (The Education Trust, 2019). Yet close to half (47.2%) of rural districts offer no advanced placement (AP) courses. One option for rural schools is to offer AP coursework through Virtual AP. Currently, 28 states offer Virtual AP, though this option may be a poor substitute for face-to-face courses (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; Mader, 2018) and may prove difficult in rural areas with limited access to high-speed Internet.

An alternative to AP coursework is dual enrollment programming. In partnership with an institute of higher education – typically a community college – a school or district can provide opportunities for high school students to earn high school and college credit simultaneously. This can be accomplished by providing high school students the opportunity to attend courses at the local community college, taking college classes virtually, or having a high school teacher credentialed by a college to teach a college credit-bearing course on the high school campus, which is the most common approach for rural students (Gagnon & Mattingly, 2015; NCES, 2019).

Career and technical education (CTE) programs are another way in which rural schools can offer students a broad array of rich curricular opportunities as well as respond to rapidly changing economic needs of rural areas (Estes, 2018). While broader, statewide policy changes are needed to advance and grow high-quality CTE programs for rural schools, there are things that rural principals in high-poverty areas can do, including establishing regional, cross-sector partnerships (Advance CTE, 2018) with business/industry, especially those that serve multiple schools or districts in a region.

Community of Care and Support for Students

This PSEL standard is wide-ranging and includes everything from an “inclusive, caring, and supportive school community” to providing “coherent systems of supports” to the importance of relationships (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015, p. 13), previously mentioned in this chapter. Additionally, rural principals in impoverished areas must navigate a cultural phenomenon of *don't get above your raisins*. This concept is reflected in the advice of an elderly neighbor in a remote, rural area of North Carolina to a young adult prior to his departure to a state university:

Ms. Myrtle: Well, now our people goes off t'school, and then they'll forget where they come from. They'll get off somewhere and forget our people back here, and some of 'em forget about the Lord. You just mind you don't get up der in dem mountains and forget about where y' come from. (Scott & Brown, 2008, p. 485)

This quotation reflects the notion that young people who leave their rural homes – for the purposes of higher education or other opportunities – are at risk of forgetting the people and the place from which they have come – and possibly forgetting their god as well. Further, the phrase reflects the concern that ambitions that take youth away from home are an implicit censure of the rural community and people of their upbringing: To do something other than what their people have done previously implies that their people are not enough, that there is more and better beyond them, beyond their community.

This cultural construct is deeply embedded in many rural communities and can manifest as pressure to eschew college and AP and dual enrollment courses. Principals must navigate these waters carefully so as not to dismiss or ridicule this cultural concept and be empathetic to the sentiment behind it: There is a “heartbreaking tension – both wanting youth to leave and needing them to stay” (Tieken, 2014, p. 115) that pulses in many rural communities. Principals need to be sensitive to this sentiment while also communicating the belief that educational attainment – whether through rigorous coursework,

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enrichment opportunities, or higher education – gives young people the opportunity to maximize their potential and ultimately benefits the community by building leaders who have the skills to serve and grow the community.

Professional Capacity of School Personnel

Rural principals must recruit, hire, induct, train, support, and retain high quality teachers. This is no easy task in rural areas, where labor markets tend to be narrow and teacher turnover rates are high (Monk, 2007). Promising practices include:

1. “Grow-your-own” initiatives, including career-switchers programs that nurture local talent through collaborations among public school systems and postsecondary institutions;
2. Targeted incentives [e.g., signing bonus, housing assistance, student loan repayment];
3. Improved recruitment and hiring practices ... [e.g., promoting advantages of rural community life; common, statewide application and job postings site; alternative certification programs];
4. Improved school-level support for teachers [e.g., high-quality induction and mentoring, including bus rides of rural routes and community tours to acclimate new teachers to the community]; and
5. Use of interactive technologies to help alleviate the problems rural schools face in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers [e.g., use of distance learning to deliver classes and services such as speech therapy, to provide professional development, and to provide mentoring]. (Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005, p. 5)

Professional Community for Teachers and Staff

Several elements of this PSEL standard – promoting collective responsibility, developing relationships, reciprocal accountability, and job-embedded professional development – have been discussed already. Additionally, leaders in high-needs, rural schools must cultivate teacher collaboration through professional learning communities (PLC). PLCs engage teachers in collaborative cycles of inquiry and action to increase student learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). Hord (2004) identified the characteristics of mature PLCs: shared and supportive leadership; shared values and vision; collective learning and application of learning; supportive conditions; and shared personal practice. To cultivate healthy PLCs, principals must build a collaborative culture, establish a results orientation, focus on learning, and build teacher capacity to develop common, formative assessments and respond intentionally when students struggle (DuFour et al., 2016).

Meaningful Engagement of Families and Communities

Rural principals serving high-needs schools need to go beyond stereotypical white, middle class parent involvement of bake sales and parent-teacher association meetings. Schools are centers of community life, and often high school athletics serve as major community events. School leaders can leverage these events to engage families and community stakeholders in academic successes and school initiatives. For example, in the hallway there may be student art on display prior to a basketball game, with students standing by their creations to talk about them and answer questions, or the math chair might make a

short presentation during half-time of a basketball game to introduce the inquiry-based approach the department will be implementing the following semester.

Further, leaders need to invest in equitable family engagement, focusing on building bridges to minority, immigrant, and refugee families (Jacques & Villegas, 2018). Educators can enact equitable family engagement by valuing families' cultures, identities, and heritage; treating families as welcomed and valued partners in student learning; and serving as a champion and advocate for families (Jacques & Villegas, 2018). Initially, building equitable family engagement can involve making proactive contact with families and learning about students through what their families share. It can also include making home visits and visiting local churches.

Engaging the community can involve proactively working with the local newspaper and radio station to disseminate information about the school. Veteran rural school principal Jerry Simmons (personal communication, July 29, 2019) created a Principal Advisory Council (PAC) comprised of “movers and shakers” in the community – those in formal and informal leadership positions and who held a good deal of social capital. The PAC met monthly to provide input and feedback. At the end of each monthly meeting, Simmons had PAC members tour classrooms so that they could see first-hand what was happening in the school – and could shape the narrative about the school throughout the community by sharing their observations and perceptions. Serving as a principal in a high-needs, rural school invariably involves “working in tandem with community leaders” (Parson et al., 2016, p. 3).

Leaders must also find ways to ferret out and leverage family and community funds of knowledge for the benefit of the school. For example, a parent who is foreperson at a local farm might be asked to guest lecture for an agricultural science class; a parent who owns a local nursery might be asked to help spruce up the beds around the school sign; and a parent with a background in web design may be asked to give feedback on the school's website to make it more effective for engaging parents.

Operations and Management

Operations and management can involve numerous thorny challenges for rural principals, including, for example, sharing busses and faculty/staff across multiple buildings, serving in a building that is in desperate need of repair and renovation, making limited resources stretch, and seeking external funding through grants and gifts to supplement resources. Additionally, principals do best by their impoverished students when they build bridges with social service agencies and foster relationships with neighboring schools and districts to share resources (Kominiak, 2018).

School Improvement

The final PSEL standard – school improvement – emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement and the principal as change agent. As discussed earlier, rural communities are often steeped in tradition and sometimes are skeptical, if not outright opposed, to change. Rural principals do well when they assess organizational change readiness; set a clear vision for change, framed in the benefits to students and community, as well as the moral imperative for change; state explicitly what will not change; and leverage internal and external stakeholders who have cultural capital in the school and community to be early adopters and advocates for the change (Reeves, 2009).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have crafted a portrait of modern-day, rural childhood poverty, acknowledging first that myriad daunting challenges still plague rural places and people, including rural schools. Despite these seemingly persistent difficulties associated with rural spaces, we as authors have intentionally cited and discussed the funds of knowledge and assets that rural places and people embody. We implore readers to conceptualize rurality from an assets-centered perspective. To that end, we have offered a variety of place-based resources and actionable practices that school leaders may leverage to create high quality learning experiences for students in rural schools. By focusing on promising research-based leadership practices, we believe that rural schools and districts can be successful in their quests and responsibilities to educate rural students at high levels, thereby providing access to unlimited post-secondary opportunities. Dispelling myths, recognizing barriers, and then accessing strengths and assets of rural-based locales are meaningful steps toward creating educational institutions that are responsive to the unique educational needs that impoverished rural students present.

Much of the focus in Sections II and III centered upon school leaders themselves. Because outstanding principals for high-poverty rural schools do not spring forth from the earth like wild onions in spring, we issue a call to district leaders, policymakers, and educational leadership preparation personnel to cultivate high quality school leaders. Pijanowski and Peer (2016) note that “the principal shortage is a national problem that is felt most deeply in the poorest and most geographically isolated corners of the country” (p. 105). Indeed, it is a “grave challenge” (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013, p. 4) to recruit and retain quality principals for rural schools. To prepare future rural school leaders in ways that promote responsive leadership, we urge policymakers to jettison the notion of a one best system of traditional school leader preparation (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995) and enact “place-based policy through the application of a *rural lens*” (Preston, et al., 2013, p. 7) that attends to the macro context of rural school leadership as well as the micro context of uniquely individual rural schools. Preparing and supporting principals to lead effectively in rural settings requires innovative and specialized preparation that is grounded in a strengths-based approach. We concur with Myende and Hlalele (2018) that “rural education improvement strategies are possible when educational leaders draw from the capacities that exist in rural spaces” (p. 21).

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Adverse Childhood Experiences: Potentially traumatic events that often have negative, lasting effects on children's health and well-being, even into adulthood. Such experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental divorce or the incarceration of a parent or guardian.

Culturally Responsive Teaching/Pedagogy: Methods and ways of teaching that recognize and honor the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning, creating conditions where students become leaders of their own learning.

Educational Equity: Educational opportunity wherein personal identity and social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin, heritage language or family background are not obstacles to achieving educational outcomes but assets and wherein all students receive needed resources and access to be successful.

Funds of Knowledge: A term that encompasses the knowledge, skills, and experiences acquired through historical and cultural interactions of an individual through community, family life, and culture obtained through everyday living that can directly or indirectly enrich formal classroom learning.

Gender Marginalization: Patterns of inequitable gender treatment that often stem from historical practices, beliefs, and social structures that have institutionalized conceptions of gender differences such that man/male, cisgender, and heteronormativity are dominant and woman/female, gender nonconforming, and sexual diversity are marginalized.

Place-Based Education: Instructional approach that immerses students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities, and experiences, using these as a foundation for the study of content within a school's curriculum. It also emphasizes learning through participation in service projects for the local school and/or community.

Professional Learning Communities: Groups of educators who meet regularly, share expertise, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students.

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Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL): Ten standards implemented in 2015 that aim to ensure district and school leaders can improve student achievement and meet new, higher expectations for what school leaders should know and be able to do in educational contexts.

Rural Denigration: The notion that rural schools, rural places, and rural people are substandard or second-class citizens.

Rural Poverty: Economic hardship characterized by an annual household income below \$24,000 in a remote, sparsely populated location.

Social Justice in Education: Awareness of and engagement in intentional efforts to transform the culture, curriculum, teaching practices, and schoolwide priorities to undo systemic and structural inequities.

Transformative Leadership: A leadership style that involves critiquing existing inequities in educational settings, working to dismantle them, and enacting profound, equitable change for all students.