ARCC
Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center

Strategies for Building Rural School District Capacity to Implement Reform: An Annotated Bibliography

November 2013

Submitted to: The Rural Working Group of the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center
Prepared by: Laura Taylor, Anne Poliakoff, Jerry Malitz, and Caitlin Howley

300 Summers St., Ste. 600 • Charleston, WV 25301 • 1-855-355-ARCC (2722) • www.arccta.org

ARCC
Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center

Implementing Best Practices

Blanton, R. E., & Harmon, H. L. (2005). Building capacity for continuous improvement of math and science education in rural schools. *The Rural Educator*, *26*(2), 6-11. http://www.ruraleducator.net/archive/26-2/26-2_Blanton.pdf

In this article, Blanton and Harmon overview the Coastal Rural Systemic Initiative (CRSI), begun in April 2000 and supported by a $6 million five-year grant from the National Science Foundation. The purpose of CRSI was to stimulate sustainable systemic improvements in science and math education in 47 high-poverty school districts with a history of low student expectations, persistent poverty, low teacher pay, and high administrative turnover. Most of the districts were located along the Atlantic Coast of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The CRSI continuous improvement process included eight steps for building capacity for sustainable change in CRSI schools: (1) developing continuous improvement teams, (2) collecting program data, (3) discussing the data with stakeholders, (4) administering and reflecting on self-assessments, (5) identifying school needs, (6) outlining clear priorities, (7) designing improvement intervention strategies, and (8) implementing and monitoring the intervention. Requiring each school in each district to follow the eight-step process reinforced key elements of systemic reform, particularly ensuring alignment of the district's K-12 curriculum for mathematics and science. As part of NSF's midpoint review of CRSI, in 2003, early achievements were noted, including evidence that districts and schools were building the capacity to make more effective decisions, gain access to new resources, and use resources more efficiently.

Chance, P. L., & Segura, S. N. (2009). A rural high school's collaborative approach to school improvement. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *24* (5) 1-12. http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/24-5.pdf

This study examines one rural high school that deliberately developed a plan for school improvement and showed improved and sustained student achievement over a five-year period through test scores, achievement of adequate yearly progress (AYP), and attendance and graduation rates. The study analyzed data from in-depth interviews, documents, and structured observations and found (1) that collaboration drove the process of school improvement and change, and (2) that instructional leadership behaviors were key to developing successful collaboration. Three elements identified as conducive to successful collaboration were: (1) scheduled time for teachers to collaborate, (2) structured collaboration times

devoted to improving instruction, and (3) leadership focused on student-centered planning and accountability. Small populations and dense relationship networks are attributes of rural schools identified as advantageous to a collaborative process for school improvement.

Erickson, A. S. G., Noonan, P. M., & McCall, Z. (2012). Effectiveness of online professional development for rural special educators. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, *31*(1), 22-32. http://www.questia.com/library/1P3-2655251331/effectiveness-of-online-professional-development-for

This study examines outcomes for rural high school special educators who participated in the online *Transition Seminar Series*. Developed in 2007 by the lead author, the seminar series was offered from 2007 to 2010 in the school year or summer. This study examined participant outcomes for 149 professionals who completed the entire series of five four-week online seminars, using a mixed-method design that incorporated several measures to collect data. The research analyzed learner characteristics, professional competency, academic performance, and satisfaction of participants. The program did not intentionally recruit rural educators, but a majority (58%) was from rural communities in 12 states. Not only did rural educators demonstrate significantly increased competency through participation in the series, their increased competency was statistically equivalent to that of non-rural participants.

Fowler, J., Butler, J. S., Cowen, J. M, Streams, M. E., & Toma, E. F. (2013, January). Public employee quality in a geographic context: A study of rural teachers. *The American Review of Public Administration,* 1-19. http://arp.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/01/24/0275074012474714.abstract

The authors of this analysis investigate the pattern of initial teacher hires in rural—particularly Appalachian Kentucky—school districts, drawing across nearly 20 years (1987-2005) of the Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board (KEPSB) dataset, supplemented by additional data sources, including scores from American College Testing and the National Teaching Examination (now Praxis). The authors noted that there was little research concerning teacher hiring patterns in predominantly rural, poor, and isolated areas, and they intended their study to begin to fill that gap. Their findings demonstrated that teachers who trained at Appalachian universities were three times more likely to obtain their first employment in a district in that region than a teacher who trained outside of Appalachia. The researchers also found the teachers with the weakest credentials

were more likely to obtain first employment in Appalachia, regardless of whether or not they were of Appalachian origin. Further, teachers from the Appalachian region who were more academically qualified were less likely to be employed in Appalachian districts than their less qualified peers. The tendency of less privileged school districts to employ new teachers of the lowest aptitude suggested that the quality of education provided by these districts may have differed systemically in ways that reinforced longstanding achievement gaps, the authors noted. The researchers concluded that recruiting high quality teachers in these areas remained a critical first step for addressing long-standing achievement gaps.

Hammer, P. C., Hughes, G., McClure, C., Reeves, C., & Salgado, D. (2005). Rural teacher recruitment and retention practices: A review of literature, national survey of rural superintendents, and case studies of programs in Virginia. Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) at Edvantia. http://edvantia.ehclients.com/site-assets/Rural_Teacher_Recruitment_and_Retention_Practices.pdf

In 2004, Edvantia, Inc. and the National Association of State Boards of Education determined to identify strategies for recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers in rural areas. They reviewed research and practice literature, surveyed 597 rural superintendents from 1,565 randomly selected school districts across the U.S., and conducted case studies of three Virginia programs that supported teacher recruitment funded through a $13.5 million federal Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant. The literature review identified four challenges for recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas: (1) geographic and social isolation, (2) lower pay, (3) difficult working conditions (such as having to teach classes in multiple subjects), and (4) the No Child Left Behind requirements for highly qualified teachers. The literature review also indicated that successful recruitment and retention practices were strategic, specific to hard-to-staff schools and subjects, sustained, and rooted in the community. Survey respondents noted their primary strategies for finding potential candidates: statewide advertising, online advertising, local advertising, and personal contacts; rural superintendents relied more heavily on statewide advertising. In terms of retention, the study indicated that the strategies most relied on in rural districts were to provide the best possible working conditions, create a positive school culture, offer professional development, and offer formal mentorship programs to new teachers. The Virginia case studies highlighted three recruiting strategies: (1) high school programs to encourage future educators, (2) career switcher programs, and (3) new teacher mentorship.

Harmon, H. (1998). Building school-to-work systems in rural America. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools*. (EDO-RC-97-7). http://www.wireinternet.com/ee_downloads/Building%20School%20to%20Work.pdf

This report describes key elements for building school-to-work partnerships and discusses their potential to reconnect rural students, teachers, and schools with their communities. Harmon reflected on the need for rural economic development, especially in remote areas, but noted that in many rural areas, jobs were low skill, routine, and unrewarding, with the result that educational investment paid off only for rural students willing to migrate to higher paying jobs. Harmon suggested that the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, although designed to give individual students portable skills, could also boost local economic development and engage schools in fostering that development, with the discussions among the key players that the school-to-work legislation mandates. The author concluded that a rural school-to-work system was more likely to succeed if it involved the community in goal-setting, used the community as a learning laboratory, engaged students in meaningful service-learning, created school-based enterprises and other entrepreneurial efforts tied to the local economy, practiced community-based career mentorship/guidance, and embraced parents as equal partners.

Harmon, H. L., Gordanier, J., Henry, L., & George, A. (2007). Changing teaching practices in rural schools. *The Rural Educator*, *28* (2), 8-12. http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ783876.pdf

The authors examine the Ozark Rural Systemic Initiative, a five-year $3.5 million initiative funded by the National Science Foundation to improve the teaching of mathematics and science in 10 rural Missouri school districts that included 32 schools. Other members of the regional partnership included the George Washington Carver National Monument, Crowder College, Missouri State University, and Missouri Southern State University, and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The key focus of the initiative was to change teaching practices to produce more effective math and science instruction for all students, based on enabling teachers to gain more knowledge and skills in these subjects. Specific steps included adoption of a standards-based curriculum, intensive professional development, and partnering with local university professors to offer a deeper science and math knowledge base. An external evaluator for the initiative also analyzed pre- and post-tests and conducted site visits with teachers and administrators to keep initiative staff informed about the impact of professional development on teaching practices.

Howley, C. (2013). Rooted in place: Responsive rural education technical assistance. ICF International, Inc. White Paper. http://www.icfi.com/insights/white-papers/2013/rooted-in-place-responsive-rural-education-technical-assistance

This white paper examines how technical assistance providers might apply insights about rural communities to inform their practice and ultimately improve their effectiveness. Rural places share characteristics that distinguish them from non-rural places which have important implications for those who provide technical assistance to educators in rural schools and districts. These qualities include small populations, distance from urban centers, and lack of scale. Equally significant are social dynamics arising from the need of local residents to interact constructively over time for the benefit of their families and community. The paper also proposes principles for providing assistance that is responsive to rural schools and districts, including: (1) an understanding of the characteristic social dynamics of rural places, (2) insight into the constraints associated with rurality, and (3) an appreciation for local strengths. Perhaps more important, however, is the translation of such knowledge into practice, (1) including engaging distinctive local practices and norms;(2) using assistance strategies that accommodate or ameliorate local constraints; (3) offering opportunities for connection; (4) linking assistance to place; and (5) helping schools, districts, and communities use their strengths to devise their own solutions.

Mollenkopf, D.L. (2009). Creating highly qualified teachers: Maximizing university resources to provide professional development in rural areas. *The Rural Educator, 30*(3), 34-39. http://www.ruraleducator.net/archive/30-3/Mollenkopf%20Vol%2030-3-correction.pdf

The highly qualified teacher requirements set forth by No Child Left Behind challenged rural school districts to recruit and retain highly qualified regular and special education teachers. This report examines how the University of Nebraska at Kearny adjusted its existing program to meet this need with sensitivity to rural issues while maximizing its limited resources: (1) creating access to the university's certification program, (2) providing professional support, (3) tailoring assignments, projects, and field-based practicum experiences, and (4) building capacity for certified rural teachers to mentor others in their regions. In 2002, the university reorganized its teacher education program to streamline its many endorsements and minimize the number of credits teachers would need in order to add a field endorsement. The university also replaced its early childhood education and early childhood special education endorsements with an early childhood unified

endorsement and restructured courses accordingly. The university also developed a professional development certification track accessible to rural school teachers in the field. While classes are mainly provided online, university instructors visit rural school teachers in their classrooms to provide feedback on performance and assist with concerns.

Schulken, M. (2010, August). Rural schools grow leaders to suit needs. *Education Week 29*(7). http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/08/11/37rural-2.h29.html

This article discusses the challenge that rural school districts face in recruiting and retaining promising teacher candidates and features profiles of three initiatives responding to the challenge: the Ozarks Teacher Corps, the University of South Dakota's new teacher preparation program, and a Leadership Academy offered by North Carolina State University. The Ozarks Teacher Corps offered $4,000 per year scholarships to rural Missouri college students who agreed to teach upon graduation in a rural school for at least three years. They prepared by serving as interns in small schools and studying rural education issues in the classroom and community. The University of South Dakota redesigned its teacher preparation program to offer a rural teacher track. Students selected for the track were notified as freshmen, assigned a sophomore project, placed in rural schools for their entire fourth year of study, and provided with university mentors for their first two years of teaching. The leadership academy at North Carolina State University offered master's-level instruction in school administration to 25 teachers and central office employees in seven rural, high-need, low-achieving districts. The educators had to make three-year commitments to work in high-need rural schools; their districts agreed to hire the academy's graduates when assistant principal and principal positions opened up.

Recruiting and Retaining Teachers

Ahearn, C., Harmon, H., & Sanders, J. R. (2006). *How to recruit and retain teachers and other school leaders in hard-to-staff rural and small school districts*. The SERVE Center at University of North Carolina at Greensboro. http://www.serve.org/uploads/publications/Rural%20RecruitmentToolkit.pdf

This toolkit is a response to the superintendents in the SERVE Rural School District Superintendents' Network, a network of superintendents across the six-state SERVE region, who identified "recruitment and retention of staff" as their top-ranked issue. The toolkit offers procedures for implementing a systematic approach for attracting,

selecting, appointing, socializing, and retaining teachers and other school leaders in hard-to-staff rural and small school districts. The toolkit includes the following tools: recruitment brochure, assessment of community resources, applicant portfolio review, applicant interview, retention checklist, and exit interviews and surveys. Each tool begins with a brief description of its purpose, premise, and procedures for effective use. The authors suggest that although a district may use the tools individually or collectively, greater success in addressing recruitment and retention issues is more likely if all six tools are integrated into the district recruitment and retention practices and viewed as a system.

Dadisman, K., Gravelle, M., Farmer, T., & Petrin, R. (2010). Grow your own and other alternative certification programs in rural school districts. *National Research Center on Rural Education Support Issue Brief.* http://www.nrcres.org/NRCRES%20GYO%20Issue%20Brief.pdf

The authors of this study analyze two nationwide surveys that examined recruiting and retaining teachers in rural areas, both conducted by the National Research Center on Rural Education Support. Results from the 2007 Rural Teacher Retention Study, which surveyed rural school district administrators across 44 states and 320 districts, revealed that more than four-fifths of the districts reported at least some difficulty filling teacher vacancies, especially in math, science, and special education. The 2009 Rural Special Education Study, which surveyed 373 special education administrators in 43 states, asked district administrators about whether they could meet the needs of special education students, and nearly fifty percent responded only "moderately well" or "not well." They reported that autism, emotional disturbances, and behavioral disorders were particularly difficult to address. The authors also looked at three strategies for addressing teacher shortages—(1) grow your own, (2) alternative certification, and (3) high school-focused—and noted the importance of formal evaluations of these new approaches in terms of rural recruitment and retention.

Lemke, J. (2010). Attracting and retaining special educators in rural and small schools: Issues and solutions. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, *29*(1), 17-21. Reprinted from *Rural Special Education Quarterly 9*(1) Spring 1988. http://www.questia.com/library/1P3-2028261801/attracting-and-retaining-special-educators-in-rural

The author of this article, first published in 1988, describes the challenges of recruiting, orienting, and retaining qualified special education teachers in rural and small schools. Administrators reported as inadequate their preparation for recruitment, orientation, and retention of teachers in rural and small schools. The

author's review of the literature found that the needs of beginning teachers in small and rural school districts significantly differed from those of teachers who began their careers in suburban and urban districts that typically had more resources and employed a much larger number of teachers. The article describes specific strategies to help recruit and retain qualified teachers.

Monk, D. H. (2007). Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers in rural areas. *The Future of Children, 17*(1), 154-177. http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/17_01_08.pdf

The author discusses recruitment and retention of teachers in rural areas by first examining the term "rural" as an important analytic category. Monk examines the concept and definitions of rural communities in detail and then surveys the organizational structures of rural schools, demographics, and educational needs of their students, in order to consider how each factor may affect the ability of rural schools to attract and retain high quality teachers. The article includes several tables, drawing on data from the National Center for Education Statistics School and Staffing Survey 2003-04, that identify the number of schools classified as rural, the number of students attending these schools, their staff profiles (education, advanced degrees, experience, and test scores), and their subject area vacancies. The author concludes by assessing the implications for policy derived from this discussion of recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers in hard-to-staff rural areas.

Beesley, A., Atwill, K., Blair, P., & Barley, Z. (2008). Strategies for recruitment and retention of secondary teachers in central region rural schools. Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). http://www.mcrel.org/~/media/Files/McREL/Homepage/Products/01_99/prod91_stratRecrutRent.ashx

This study investigates recruitment and retention among rural high schools in the Central Region of the U.S., using data from the 2003-2004 School and Staffing Survey (SASS) and then distinguishing two groups of rural high schools that the data indicated to be either successful or unsuccessful in hiring teachers for vacancies. The authors compared the two groups and found no correlation between successful recruitment and the use of the strategies specified in the SASS questionnaire. Researchers augmented these findings by interviewing seven rural principals that their state agencies identified as successful. The principals reported successfully filling vacancies across all high school subjects without using any of the SASS-defined strategies. They attributed their success most often to recruiting their own graduates or others from their geographic area who would be comfortable in a rural

environment, and several principals emphasized that longstanding community ties encouraged teacher retention as well.

Developing Policy and Building Partnerships

Gordon, D. (2011). Remote learning: Technology in rural schools. *THE Journal (Technological Horizons in Education), 38*(9), 18-24. http://www.questia.com/library/1G1-272166767/remote-learning-technology-in-rural-schools-making

The author notes that, although new technologies offer rural districts an invaluable tool for overcoming the challenges of remote and sparse populations, these districts often face barriers to successfully implementing technology, including shortages of infrastructure, financial resources, and teachers, staff or other community partners knowledgeable about technology. The author briefly describes innovations in several rural communities designed to tap the power of technology, including: Kodiak Island Borough School District's use of distance learning, which provided access to better-qualified instructors, more content areas, and improved scores; a partnership between Vanderbilt university and 10 rural districts in Arkansas and Maine to provide STEM education through video-conferencing and a WiFi bus; a partnership between Virginia Tech University and Danville Public Schools that led to the university's installing a gigabit fiber, offering guidance on a long-term technology plan, and launching a faculty development program on technology tools. The author notes the value of rural districts seeking university partners when undertaking technology initiatives.

Hannum, W. H., Irvin, M. J., Banks, J. B., & Farmer, T. W. (2009) Distance education use in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education 24* (3). http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/24-3.pdf

This study examines the prevalence of distance education through a national survey of a randomly selected sample of U.S. rural school districts. Its purpose was to determine the extent to which rural schools were using distance education and the technologies, curriculum, perceived need, satisfaction, and barriers to its use. Data were collected through telephone surveys with 394 school districts selected at random from among those qualified for the Rural Education Achievement Program, which identifies and assists the neediest rural schools. Researchers at the National Research Center on Rural Education Support developed the 43-item questionnaire for this study. The study found that most rural school districts were using distance education, and that the subjects most often offered were math, foreign language, and English. The majority of students who enrolled in distance education courses

completed their courses. A large majority of the districts indicated their satisfaction with distance education courses, and nearly half stated they were very satisfied. Two-thirds of the districts reported a need for additional distance education courses, and only a small portion indicated they could offer all the advanced and enrichment classes their students need without using distance education. The large majority of the districts did not see connectivity as a barrier. Common barriers reported were funding, scheduling, and difficulty in implementing courses.

Sawchuk, Stephen. (2013, August 28). For rural teachers, support is just a click away. *Education Week.* http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/08/28/02mentor.h33.html?tkn=ONZF87pieLKm0KcXD9%2F1Fan2X4a3U1eKsbpQ&cmp=clp-edweek&utm_source=fb&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=mrss&cmp=RSS-FEED

In 2002, the Science Math Resource Center at Montana State University created an online platform for math and science teachers called "E-Mentoring for Student Success," with support from the National Science Foundation, the New Teacher Center, and the National Science Teacher Association. Its main objective was to use an online platform to support and connect teachers during their first years of teaching with mentors, regardless of the challenges of geographic distance and time. The New Teacher Center matched a teacher with an experienced peer in his or her field, and they communicated via Skype, telephone or private messaging. The e-mentoring program grew to include special education and math, and 1,500 teachers across all 50 states participated in 2013. This article featured the successes of an e-mentoring program in Kansas and its pilot initiative to allow teachers to upload videotapes of their instruction to a secure website where their mentors could access and comment on the tapes.

Warren, L. L., & Peel, H. A. (2005). Collaborative model for school reform through a rural school/university partnership. *Education*, *126*(2), 346-352. http://www.questia.com/library/1G1-142057922/collaborative-model-for-school-reform-through-a-rural

This paper describes the partnership between a rural school and a university to devise a school reform plan to address the school's low performing status. Facing the challenge of turning around the school's achievement issues within one year, the school leader looked to her alma mater (East Carolina University) for partnership. The outcome of her contact with the university was a collaborative partnership that produced a school reform plan and a successful outcome in terms of improved student achievement at the school. The authors state that the key principles of the

partnership were leading with a vision, establishing trust, developing a reform plan, and reflecting, adjusting, and improving systems for continued success. The school reform plan included specific instructional strategies to improve achievement.

Farmer, T. A., (2009) Unique rural district politics, *The Rural Educator*, *30*(2), 29-33 http://www.ruraleducator.net/archive/30-2/Farmer.pdf

This article identifies many of the common political challenges faced by educational leaders in a rural school district setting and offers recommendations for effectively accomplishing organizational objectives within this political environment. Major topics include the politics of finance, national mandates and their impact on rural schools, special interest groups, and the trend toward privatization. The author concludes that effective rural district leaders hone their skills for politics and communication, develop interpersonal relationships to facilitate collaboration, and proactively seek solutions to emerging conflicts.

Increasing Economies of Scale and Fiscal Capacity

Colf, M., & Harmon, H. (2011, Fall). Serving rural school districts and communities: Rethinking the ESA commitment. *Perspectives, 17*, 31-40. http://www.iu9.org/cms/lib05/PA33000447/Centricity/Domain/110/Seneca_Highlands_IU9_Rural_Initiative.pdf

This article explores the evolving role of Seneca Highlands Intermediate Unit Nine (IU9), which serves 14 districts, all small and rural, in North Central Pennsylvania. Intermediate units across Pennsylvania offer services ranging from special education services to cooperative purchasing to professional development and instructional materials. Facing state fiscal deficits and decreasing school budgets, the leadership of IU9 determined to rethink its mission and services to more directly align with the needs of rural school districts and their communities. IU9 embarked on a strategic planning process that led to the proposal for an IU9 Rural Leadership Initiative. The strategic planning process in turn led to a consortium of rural IUs, an annual Rural Education Leadership Conference, and an IU Rural Think Tank. The second Rural Education Leadership Conference, scheduled for July 2011, proposed to examine emerging trends in the region's rural culture.

Enerson, L. (2009). Educational service agencies in Massachusetts: Building capacity in small school districts. Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives. http://moecnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/esasinma-moec-jan2009-1.pdf

This white paper, unanimously adopted by the membership of the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC), proposes a regional system of collaboratives to increase district central office capacity to support instruction; increase academic opportunities and choice for students and parents; and lower operating and administrative costs through economies-of-scale. The thesis of the paper is that more intensive use of educational service agencies (or educational collaboratives in Massachusetts) could (1) preserve the integrity of educational services while increasing administrative and support service efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and (2) help small districts respond to their students and the demands of educational reform, by freeing their leaders from devoting time, energy and financial resources on support functions rather than critical curriculum and instruction issues. The author states that the 28 MOEC educational collaboratives already provide cost-savings for districts across the state through programming for the most disabled students; professional development for teachers and administrators; cooperative purchasing; management of Medicaid billing; and a special education transportation network. Expanding shared services administered through the state's existing collaboratives, the paper argues, is a cost- effective alternative to the consolidation of smaller districts and neighborhood-based schools.

Howley, C., & Hambrick, K. (2011). Interdistrict cooperatives improve cost-effectiveness and make common cents. *District Administration*, *47*(7), 70-72. http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/pmg/da0711/index.php?startid=70

Howley and Hambrick discuss the formation of interdistrict cooperatives to share services, staffing, and/or purchasing as a strategy to reduce costs without sacrificing quality. Cooperatives are voluntary, semi-formal, interdistrict agreements between two or more school districts, in contrast to intermediate education units, which are funded and/or managed by state departments of education. Cooperatives enable districts to take advantage of economies of scale, ranging from bulk printing to sharing teachers of hard-to-staff subjects. The authors note that although there is little research confirming whether or not cooperatives do, in fact, produce savings, what evidence does exist indicates savings ranging from modest to substantial. They mention additional advantages offered by cooperatives, noted in other studies, including improved efficiency and services, elimination of redundancy, more highly qualified staff, and evading the political repercussions of consolidations.

Semke, C. A., & Sheridan, S. M. (2011). Family-school connections in rural educational settings: A systematic review of the empirical literature. The National Center for Research on Rural Education, R²Ed Working Paper No. 2011-1. http://r2ed.unl.edu/workingpapers/2011/2011_1_Semke_Sheridan.pdf

This literature review examines research on family involvement and family-school partnerships in rural schools, synthesizes the state of the research, and proposes a research agenda on family-school partnerships in rural settings. The search identified 18 published studies that met the criteria for this review. The authors found that most study designs did not allow for general conclusions regarding the role of rurality, and as a result it was difficult to summarize the findings and premature to draw widespread conclusions. Several studies did identify positive outcomes of family-school connections for rural children, however. The authors also proposed a research agenda: (1) studies that by design and sampling address rural education; (2) studies that are rigorous quasi-experiments and experiments; (3) a consensus definition of "rural," to make it possible to compare empirical findings across studies; and (4) commonly accepted definitions of family-school concepts.

The Rural School and Community Trust. (2008, October). Student loan forgiveness options for teachers and students. *Rural Policy Matters: A Newsletter of Rural School and Community Action, 10*(10). http://www.ruraledu.org/user_uploads/file/rpm/RPM10_10.pdf

The article outlines three federal student loan forgiveness programs for college graduates who taught certain subjects or taught in low-income schools, programs that could be an important teacher recruiting tool: (1) Perkins Loans, (2) Federal Family Education Loans and Direct Loans, and (3) Higher Education Act loan provisions. Low-income schools were defined as those in which 30 percent or more of students met a measure of poverty under Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Many states also offered loan forgiveness programs to prospective teachers. For a school to benefit from student loan forgiveness programs in teacher recruiting, it had to be listed on the federal student loan website as a low-income school, have openings in state shortage areas, and advertise the school's eligibility for federal and state loan forgiveness programs.