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Rural Roots

News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust

50 Years After *Brown*, Parents and Students Fight for Equality in Mississippi's Delta Schools

*By Elisabeth Higgins Null,
Rural School and Community Trust*

For many of today's young people, the civil rights movement has been relegated to America's mythic past. Though they celebrate the toppling of segregation's legal structures, few born after the 1960s feel a present connection to the movement's human drama and sense of urgency. In the Mississippi Delta, however, rural communities have a rich sense of place: every creek, cotton field, church, and courthouse has a story to tell. In the Delta, young African Americans are inspired by local civil rights heroes, men and women both known and unknown to the outside world.

There, children and their elders work side by side to keep transforming institutions of local power. In doing so, they are conscious of carrying the civil rights movement forward into a new century. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 guaranteed the right to vote, but Mississippi's black residents are making sure that every vote counts or receives its proper

weight. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) decided that "separate" was no longer "equal" under the law, but residents are still working today through the interconnected grassroots organizations of Southern Echo and the Mississippi Education Working Group (MEWG) to equalize educational opportunity in the public schools, which few white students attend and which usually offer substandard resources and instruction.

Local Community Organizing

In the Mississippi Delta, an average of one out of two African-American children is born into poverty; area schools provide meager skills for the 67%–80% of youngsters who graduate from high school and hope to advance economically. If problems like this are common to many parts of the United States, they are compounded in Mississippi where they embed themselves in racial, social, and economic patterns dating back to the plantation era.

"Racism in Mississippi is not about hate," says Leroy Johnson, director of



Helen Johnson speaks on an issue during a December 2003 MEWG meeting.

Southern Echo, the community training and development organization founded in 1990 by three veterans of the civil rights movement: Hollis Watkins, Michael Sayer, and Johnson himself—a much younger man than the others, but a veteran nonetheless. ("I was a 'lap activist'" Johnson explains. "I sat through civil rights meetings on my father's knee.")

Southern Echo reiterates in its brochures and grant applications that

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Rural Roots is published six times per year by the Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust). The Rural Trust is the premier national nonprofit organization addressing the crucial relationship between good schools and thriving rural communities. Working in some of the poorest, most challenging rural places, the Rural Trust involves young people in learning linked to their communities, improves the quality of teaching and school leadership, advocates for appropriate state educational policies, and addresses the critical issue of funding for rural schools.

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First Person



CARRIE L. ELLIS

Michelle Cadwallader, a 4th grade teacher at IDEA and a Teach For America alumnus, reviews vocabulary words with her students.

A Bright IDEA from Teach For America Alumni

By Carrie L. Ellis and Vicente Viray

When Tom Torkelson graduated from Georgetown University in 1997, he was looking for a professional challenge that would allow him to make an impact, gain knowledge for his future goals, and become a part of a new community. He met all of these objectives by joining Teach For America, and becoming a teacher in the Rio Grande Valley.

Since 1990, more than 10,000 people have joined Teach For America, signing on to teach for two years in underserved communities and becoming lifelong leaders in the effort to ensure educational equity. Teach For America's 20 placement sites include high-need rural areas such as the Mississippi Delta, rural North Carolina, South Louisiana, and a Navajo Nation reservation in New Mexico. While some corps members move elsewhere after their two-year commitment, many—like Torkelson—stay in their original placement communities.

Six and a half years after first moving to Donna, Texas, Torkelson is now a leading member of the community. He serves as the principal of IDEA Academy, an

acclaimed charter school he co-founded with Joann Gonzales, another Teach For America alum. IDEA Academy, which stands for Individuals Dedicated to Excellence and Achievement, began as a district program designed to accelerate student achievement. It evolved into a state charter school in 2000.

Students at IDEA Academy face tremendous odds. According to the Texas Education Agency's 2002 accountability ratings, only four percent of 11th and 12th graders in surrounding districts take the SAT or ACT. Of those students who take the test, only two percent score at or above the mean (1000-SAT, 24 Composite ACT). "There are limited options for Valley students who want to be prepared to truly excel at the best colleges and universities," said Tracy Epp, director of IDEA's new college preparatory high school, and one of ten Teach For America alumni working at the school.

As a result, IDEA Academy has worked hard to foster a college-going culture among its students. In just three years, the school has earned the reputation of being home to the hardest

Feedback

Do you have any questions, comments or feedback? Something got you jazzed up? Think we should cover your story? Have an idea for us? Have a rural education need that we are not fulfilling? We greatly value your thoughts and opinions. Write to the Editor at the Rural School and Community Trust: 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20006. Or e-mail: editor@ruraledu.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

working students in the Rio Grande Valley—and for good reason. Its students attend school from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., complete a challenging curriculum, and are required to exhibit excellent behavior and focus. All students, parents, and teachers sign a contract agreeing to put forth their best effort to ensure every student is ready to go to college upon graduation. In fact, admission to (and the commitment to attend) a four-year college are among the school's graduation requirements.

IDEA Academy students appreciate these high expectations. Eighth grader Cristal Garcia, says the college acceptance requirement is “spurring us to get into college... Sometimes we get teased by people from other schools, but I think it's going to be worth it.” Ninth grader Olga Calderon enjoys the rigor of the school. “Here you have to do your homework,” she said. “It's not optional.”

“Over the last five years, we've witnessed students whose lives have been transformed as they became immersed in our culture of hard work and personal responsibility,” Torkelson said.

Teach For America alumni are working to improve academic achievement in rural areas across the country. In 2001, Caleb Dolan and Tammi Sutton founded Gaston College Preparatory, a Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) school, in their original placement community in North Carolina. Troubled by the small number of students who saw college as a viable option, Dolan and Sutton started the school to ensure students in their community could gain the necessary skills and knowledge to make college a reality.

“KIPP wanted us to start an urban school in Atlanta,” Dolan recalled, “but we were committed to our rural community. Rural issues run just as deep. There's crime, racism, and limited expectations. We also have to contend with isolation. It's harder for students to find models of success.”

Despite these challenges, the school has already made incredible strides. At the start of its first year, less than 50 percent of its students were at or above grade level. By the end of the same year, that number had increased to 92 percent. Many of the school's students come from underserved backgrounds. More than 85

Tap Into the Teach For America Alumni Network

There are currently more than 7,500 Teach For America alumni. That number will more than double over the next five years. In addition to serving as accomplished school leaders and teachers, alumni are impacting rural communities in many ways. Aaron Brenner founded Proyecto Derecho del Corazon, a community art center in Donna, Texas, to provide students with the opportunity to celebrate their culture and heritage through art. Bill Norbert, Majority Whip in the Maine House of Representatives, is working to impact his state's funding for education, requirements for teachers, testing standards for children, teacher recruitment strategies, and other policies.

Include alumni in your rural school network by:

Posting a job: Teach For America's Office of Career and Civic Opportunities (OCCO) offers a free job posting service that reaches thousands of alumni each month. Go to <http://www.teachforamerica.org> and follow the “Post a Job/Opportunity” prompts to register.

Tap into a regional alumni network: Alumni are active all across the country. Regional alumni networks are an excellent resource for accessing local talent. Contact the OCCO at carrie.ellis@TeachForAmerica.org.

Publicize Opportunities for Civic Engagement: Alumni stay civically engaged after their two-year commitment. Many work on election campaigns, serve on school boards, and help pass education initiatives. Contact the OCCO at carrie.ellis@TeachForAmerica.org with information.

percent of its students receive free or reduced-price lunch, and over 95 percent are African-American.

Dolan credits much of the school's success to the focused commitment of students, parents, and faculty. “We have a clear mission,” he said. “Every child who attends our school should go to the college of his or her choice. There's incredible value in having such a clear pur-

pose, with everyone on the same page, refusing to accept anything less.”

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Jeremy Beard's students encourage each other to get the correct answers in their classroom quiz bowl.

Parents and Students Fight for Equality in Mississippi's Delta Schools *from page 1*

"racism is about domination and control of the African-American community by the white community. . . hate is merely a tool for manipulating people." Thinking about racism in this way, one begins to see why a grassroots movement to improve the public schools has evolved from earlier civil rights activity in Mississippi.

As Southern Echo began holding listening sessions in the Delta region during the early '90s, they found that many adults were so glad to have any sort of education offered to their children that they hesitated to step forward and demand something more. African-American parents who did work for improvements within their schools often encountered hostile or contemptuous administrators who mistook parents' lack of formal schooling for a lack of wisdom. Southern Echo learned that parents also knew that their children were stultified and mistreated, but needed to learn what their rights were and to develop a community vision of what education could and should be.

Delta school boards have a habit of operating with tightly controlled agendas, inconvenient meeting schedules, and invisible budget processes. School board members often serve at the behest of white residents whose children attend the private academies. In some schools, student discipline is unusually harsh and is used as a way to keep parents and civic activists in line, as well. A child who exercises too much initiative or displays too much curiosity might be beaten or suspended as a "troublemaker." Parents and teachers who hold unauthorized meetings or otherwise challenge the status

quo can be threatened with job loss and retribution against family members.

Some communities where school tensions are acute have, despite the odds, become places of hope and growing cooperation. Grassroots reform efforts are thriving. The emphasis of local organizations loosely affiliated with Southern Echo through the Mississippi Education Working Group (MEWG) has been to exercise more control over the local and state mechanisms of government and authority. MEWG groups turn to Southern Echo for technological, legislative, and organizational training as well as for legal help. Their priorities, on the other hand, are determined by what each individual community considers most important.

Organizing for Change in Tunica County

Seventeen miles south of Memphis, along the Mississippi River, sits Tunica County, ranked the second poorest county in the nation according to the 1990 Census. Tunica's African-American children attend majority black public schools with a long record of low academic performance, while most white parents send their children to a private academy originally established to avoid federal court desegregation orders. The public schools have been chronically indebted and underserved.

The Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County (Concerned Citizens) was formed in 1993 to address these problems. The coalition of activists, parents, students, and local school board members (aided by Southern Echo) negotiated

successfully to allocate 20% of new tax revenues from the county's expanding casino industry explicitly for public schools. School debt was eliminated within six months of this policy's adoption.

In the years that followed, the group worked to defeat a proposal by the Tunica County Board of Supervisors to re-register all voters, and to delay construction of new schools until existing public school facilities were renovated.

In 1997, the Mississippi Department of Education tried to abolish Tunica's school district and assume direct state control of its operations. The stated reason was the district's "poor performance," but local and state civil rights groups believe the real motive was to assist powerful development interests who wanted to build a new school near a planned upscale housing development and farther away from Tunica's African American students. In Tunica, where the best jobs available to black families paid less than \$18,000 a year, segregation of the new school would be assured not by law but by economic exclusion.

Concerned Citizens, joined by other members of the Mississippi Education Working Group, Southern Echo, Mississippi's Legislative Black Caucus, state Rep. Bennie Thompson, and other organizations saved the school by fighting a major legal battle and presenting four alternative sites suitable for the school. Eventually, the new school was constructed two miles away from the original site and fairly close to an African-American development.

The victory of Concerned Citizens and its allies demonstrated that local African Americans could stand up to a powerful establishment that included the local school board, the County Board of Supervisors, the State Board of



From left to right: Citizens rally at the state capitol for improved special education programs; Ellen Reddy from Holmes County uses graphs to show Mississippi; Holmes County youth show photos of illegal dumps in their area; adults and children work together in strategy and planning sessions; and set an agenda. Photos courtesy of Southern Echo.

Education, the State Superintendent of Education, the State Attorney General, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, a powerful Mississippi law firm, and many state legislators. In 2000, Concerned Citizens proved its strength by winning three of the five positions on the local school board.

Fighting for Quality Education in Holmes County

Another example of a grassroots organization involving students directly in research and organizing activity is Citizens for Quality Education (CQE) in Holmes County, formed in 1996. In this county with its long civil rights history, African-American children go to 100% black public schools, while white students attend a private academy opened in 1971 to block federally ordered school desegregation. As in Tunica County, the public schools are inadequate and starved for money, and have been plagued by blatant abuses of power by teachers and principals. Initially, CQE galvanized community support by seeking to remove a third-grade teacher who was terrorizing her students by beating them and insulting their families. When complaints to the principal and superintendent went unheeded, CQE recorded student statements, held community gatherings to develop action plans, and held formal meetings with both the superintendent and school board. The teacher was eventually fired.

During the 1998–1999 school year, students from all grade levels surveyed and located 35 illegal toxic dump sites in Holmes County. After preparing a slide show that emphasized the most hazardous

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How unevenly resources and teachers are distributed in and a local community group meets to determine priorities

Resource Center

Civil Rights Education in the Classroom

www.teachingforchange.org

- *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching: A Teaching Guide for K–12 Classrooms* is new and available from Teaching for Change and the Poverty & Race Research Action Council for \$17. The book provides lessons and articles on how to “go beyond the heroes approach to the Civil Rights Movement.”

- *Schools Service for Social Justice: Stories of Inspiration, Strategies for Implementation* by Deborah Leta Habib is \$14. The book profiles 11 school-based initiatives that link service learning, social justice and multicultural education.

www.rethinkingschools.org

- *Reading, Writing and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word* by Linda Christensen is \$13, and has essays, lesson plans and a collection of student writing all focused on language arts teaching for justice.

- *Rethinking our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice, Volumes I and II* are \$12.95 each or \$19.95 for the set. These companion guides provide teaching ideas and examples of ways teachers can promote the values of community, justice and equality while building academic skills.

The organization’s magazine, *Rethinking Schools*, provides quarterly reviews of new teaching ideas, policy analysis and resources. Subscribe for \$17.95 a year.

<http://www.carts.org> —

Cultural Arts Resources for Teachers and Students

- *The Kid’s Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose and Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action* by Barbara A. Lewis is for grades 5 and up for \$18.95. This practical guide for kids that covers how-to’s in letter writing, interviewing, getting media attention and raising money also includes profiles of other kids doing great work and resources for moving forward.

- *The Civil Rights Movement for Kids: A History with 21 Activities* by March C. Turck is for ages 9 and up, for \$14.95. This book chronologically charts important dates in the Civil Rights movement and clearly defines terms, provides the text of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and suggests interactive activities for young learners to better understand how to apply their learning to the real world.

http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/teaching_with_documents.html

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration’s digital classroom section focusing on “teaching with documents” provides links to the actual historical documents in pdf format for study and suggests lesson plans for analyzing documents and their historical context. Check out the links for “Documents Related to *Brown v. Board of Education*,” “Frontiers in Civil Rights: The Dorothy Davis Case,” “Court Documents Related to Martin Luther King, Jr., and Memphis Sanitation Workers,” and “The Civil Rights Act and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.”

<http://www.facing.org> — Facing History and Ourselves

“For more than 27 years, Facing History has engaged teachers and students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-semitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry.”

Facing History’s website offers lesson plans to guide teachers in bringing tough subjects into the classroom. Current offerings include: the role of hate radio during the Rwandan genocide and a civil rights study tour where students and teachers can listen to some of the individuals who made a difference in the U.S. civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s.

Parents and Students Fight for Equality in Mississippi's Delta Schools *from page 5*

materials, students pressured the County Board of Supervisors into letting them present their findings at a meeting. Initially hostile to the idea, the supervisors were moved by the students' hard work and clarity. They agreed to clean up the sites, to consider student proposals to locate garbage collection centers throughout the county, and to schedule bulk item pickups. Holmes County students also worked with CQE to get the Federal Aviation Administration to halt the aerial spraying of pesticides on cotton plantations surrounding many of the local schools—a practice that had exposed students to chemicals drifting through their classroom windows.

In addition to its environmental activism, CQE has assumed a major role in the Mississippi Education Working Group by researching the impact of high stakes testing on schools staffed by long-term substitute teachers.

Preserving a Community School in Montgomery County

At least one Delta community group, the Action and Education Reform/Concerned Citizens of Montgomery County (ACEAR), has organized not just to improve schools, but also to preserve a school it knows and cares for—Duck Hill Elementary School, located in a small, predominantly African-American community of the same name. About 75% of the students are black and about 90% receive free or reduced-price lunch. The Duck Hill students perform close to or even above average on most standardized tests, with the 2nd grade recently scoring 100% proficiency in math and English. The school offers accelerated courses and has introduced innovative programs in both math and reading.

Parents came together in 1997 when Duck Hill's high school closed. It did not seem fair that their students would have to be bused 40 miles away to a largely black high school in Grenada when the mostly white high school in Winona was just 10 miles away. Winona, however, had organized itself as a separate municipal school within Montgomery County,

electing its own board and operating independently of the county's jurisdiction. Despite this, Winona's residents were still allowed to vote for the county school board, keeping a superintendent in power who did little to further the educational needs of the county students. On that basis, ACEAR successfully sued in 1999 to invalidate the election of the County Superintendent. The long-term incumbent was defeated in a new election in 2000, and a new candidate was hired.

Unfortunately, the new superintendent believed that Duck Hill Elementary was too expensive to keep open, maintaining that the county could save \$900,000 if Duck Hill children were bused 50 miles to Kilmichael Elementary School. This time around, the community was ready. Al White, an African-American school board member backed by ACEAR, had become chairman of the county's school board which, by 2001, had a black majority. He worked actively to make the board accessible to the entire county by rotating meetings from school to school. White also opened the budget process to community suggestions and oversight. Responding to parental concern, he kept the question of Duck Hill's closure off the agenda until the state's Department of Public Instruction had reviewed the financial numbers. The state estimated that savings derived from closing the school would be only \$150,000 a year; it offered to search for ways of keeping the school open. The Duck Hill community promised to waive the school's sewage fees. Presented with this new data and a unified opposition, the superintendent withdrew her recommendation to close the school for at least a year so all parties could seek a permanent solution.

Meaningful Learning Opportunities for All Students

The idea of students sidestepping rote school instruction in a quest for meaningful learning has roots in the Mississippi civil rights movement. In the 1960s, adult students flocked to "free-

dom schools" run by young civil rights workers. African Americans not only improved their reading and writing skills but also analyzed the Constitution in preparation for tests required for voter registration. Civil rights activist and mathematician Robert Moses, founder of the Algebra Project and the former director of the Southern Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's Mississippi Project, continues this tradition. He, and the teachers he has trained, show young African Americans how to liberate their minds from rote learning by studying algebra as a gateway to fuller political, economic, and educational emancipation. While algebra is frequently not offered in Delta public schools until the junior or senior year of high school, Moses targets middle school students.

Headquartered in Jackson, Mississippi, the Algebra Project inspired parents and middle school students in the Sunflower County town of Indianola to inaugurate the Indianola Math Games League (1994). The idea was to have fun with math while working on leadership and organizing skills. The League had a volunteer staff and a majority student board. Students decided how to run the League and recruited others to participate. Hundreds of students and their parents began collaborating, sharing their concerns and dreams about education. In 1995, the district superintendent tried to shut down the League and exclude it from public school facilities, but the community resisted, and he was forced to back down.

In 1996, the Indianola Parent Student Group (IPSG) was spun off from the Math Games League as a separate entity to influence local education policy. The group has focused on equal educational facilities and rights, fighting for a complete science laboratory and new textbooks for the black middle school. The group was instrumental in mobilizing the public and engaging the media to call attention to abuses of power by a new principal at Indianola's High School, who allowed students to be arrested by local law enforcement at the office secretary's discretion and permitted public paddlings of students for infractions as minor as not having a pencil.

IPSG also has advocated for more humane treatment for special education

students who were being physically abused for the very behavior that had singled them out as requiring specialized schooling in the first place. (Hyperactive children, for instance, were beaten with heavy wooden paddles because of their inability to sit still for long periods of time.) With help from the Southern Echo staff and other Mississippi Education Working Group members, IPSG presented its case to the state's assistant superintendent of special education and organized a meeting with other MEWG organizations as well as state and local officials. Since then, a monitoring program has been established, IPSG has helped state education officials craft significant passages of a public education accountability law, and special needs children are beginning to get the individualized attention and adaptive technologies they need.

50 Years After *Brown*: Carrying the Civil Rights Movement Forward

Mississippi Education Working Group organizations are increasingly proposing political redistricting and working the political process both inside and outside the formal system. Southern Echo continues to help as individual grassroots organizations become increasingly able to raise their own funds, organize their own agendas, and present their cases at public hearings. But Southern Echo's help is shifting over time. In the beginning, each group needed to define what it wanted to do and learn to focus specifically on local issues. Now groups are looking beyond their county boundaries as they cope with problems needing broad public attention at regional, state and even national levels. As groups become better organized, Southern Echo's primary function is to help put organizations in touch with each other.

Fifty years after *Brown*, equal educational opportunity for all children is not yet a reality in the Mississippi Delta. But, as demonstrated by groups affiliated with the Mississippi Education Working Group, the fight continues—and the hope for change is strong—as Mississippi's rural activists carry the civil rights movement into a new century.

Publications of Note

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students learn to lead focus groups, interview community members, conceptualize and produce a video, and organize and facilitate a community premiere (including leading small discussion groups). The publication is available to order from <http://www.orton.org> or by calling (802) 773-6336. A two-day training on how to incorporate the curriculum into the classroom will be held on April 30–May 1 in Montpelier, Vermont. Interested individuals can receive more information or register by contacting Patti Coultas at the Lamoille Area Professional Development Academy at <http://www.lapdvt.org> or calling (802) 888-1105.

Meaningful Student Involvement: Guide to Inclusive School Change



By Adam Fletcher
<http://www.SoundOut.org>, 2003

This guide “promotes democracy in education” by providing tools and ideas for engaging students in researching, planning, teaching, evaluating, leading and advocating for schools. Students can play a meaningful role in school reform and become more than passive recipients in learning. The publication is available for free download at <http://www.soundout.org/MSIGuide.pdf>.

NewsBriefs

Focus on Rural Education Finance

The Fall 2003 *Journal of Education Finance* is a special issue focusing on rural education finance, an often overlooked subject area in education research. Sponsored in part by the Rural Trust, this *Journal* aims to stimulate discussion about rural schools and issues and elevate them in the policy arena. Articles cover the unique characteristics of rural education finance, a review of recent rural school funding litigation, the definition of adequacy and equity in rural schools, and more. The *Journal* is published by the Association of School Business Officials International: <http://asbointl.org/Publications/PublicationsOnline/index.asp?bid=84>.

Law Review Covers Rural Education

The Fall 2003 edition of the *Nebraska Law Review*, published by the University of Nebraska College of Law, represents the first time a legal journal has addressed rural education finance as its main topic. Articles such as “The impact of litigation on rural students: From free textbooks to school consolidation” and “The power of small schools: Achieving equal educational opportunity through academic success and democratic citizenship” are written by professors of law and leaders in the education law field. Copies can be obtained by contacting: William S. Hein & Co., 1285 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14209 or by going to their website at: <http://www.wshein.com/Catalog/Gut.asp?TitleNo=105710>.

Transitioning ERIC/CRESS

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools may have closed its doors at the end of December, but its invaluable resources are still available while it transitions to its new home at the U.S. Department of Education. ERIC Digests and books can be found at <http://www.ael.org/cress>. Syracuse University will host the ERIC search engine, lesson plans and other resources at <http://www.eduref.org/Eric/>. To stay up to date on the move to a new contractor and model, go to: <http://eric.ed.gov> or call (800) LET-ERIC.

Publications of Note

New From the Rural Trust

Land for Granted: The Effects of Acreage Policies on Rural Schools and Communities

By Barbara Kent Lawrence, Ed.D.
Rural School and Community Trust,
December 2003

This new policy brief from the Rural Trust finds that state minimum acreage requirements (imposed in 23 states) cause problems for rural school districts, such as promoting larger schools and school consolidation and contributing to suburban sprawl by moving schools onto undeveloped rural land. The report explains the kinds of policies in effect in various states and outlines their impacts on small, rural school districts. The brief is available for free download

at <http://www.ruraledu.org/newsroom/landforgranted.htm>.

Other Publications

Letters to the Next President: What We Can Do About the Real Crisis in Public Education

Edited by Carl Glickman
Teachers College Press,
February 2004

This collection of more than 30 letters addressing our next president is written by education experts, elected officials, practitioners, students, community leaders and parents. It offers suggestions on solving critical problems in public education. Discussions on higher standards, comprehensive assessments, equitable funding resources,

teacher retention and saving small schools are among the many issues addressed in the letters. The issues of America's rural schools are well represented in letters by Rachel B. Tompkins, President of the Rural Trust, rural Vermont school superintendent William Mathis, and the Navajo teenagers of Little Singer Community School in rural Arizona, among others. The book is \$14.95 and is available at <http://www.teacherscollegepress.com>.

Lights, Camera...Leadership

By Helen Beattie
Orton Family Foundation
and the Vermont Rural Partnership,
January 2004

In this place-based/student leadership development curriculum, leadership skills are woven into the task of the students creating a video of some important issue in their community, capturing it from past, present and future perspectives. The

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