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ED601: Dr. Carroll

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**Literature Review:**

**Student Achievement in Rural Schools**

The January 2012 report published by the Rural School and Community Trust Policy Program, *Why Rural Matters: The Condition of Rural Education in the 50 States*, is sixth in a series of ongoing reports intended to draw state policy makers’ attention to the unique characteristics and needs of their respective rural student populations. In this report, Strange, Johnson, Showalter, and Klein (2012) evaluated states’ rural school districts’ capacity to provide quality education for their student populations using five gauges with component indicators to determine “where key factors that impact the schooling process converge to present the most extreme challenges to schooling outcomes, and so suggest the most urgent and most comprehensive need for attention from policymakers,” (Strange et al., 2012, p. #). Levels of childhood poverty, student and family economic and educational backgrounds, economic stability and viability of each community, the state level of education finance, and policies that either hinder or advance the educational outcomes within vulnerable rural communities and their respective schools were considered. The report states that “11.4 million students who attend either rural schools or rural districts comprise over 23% of public school students…two in five live in poverty…one in four is a child of color, and one in eight has changed residence in the past 12 months,” (Strange et al., 2012, p. #). Furthermore, rural schools in the South and Southwestern states are continually rated in the top quartile of the Rural Education Priority Gauge which is the summative rankings based on the five gauges and their components and indicates a need for higher levels of state support in both funding and policy attention. Policy makers can no longer ignore the needs of rural school populations due to the observation from Strange et al. (2012, p. #) that, “Growth in rural school enrollment is outpacing non-rural enrollment growth in the United States, and rural schools are becoming more complex with increasing rates of poverty, diversity, and special needs students,” which impacts the overall student achievement outcomes and future economic viability of each state where the educational challenges and costs continue to rise.

The report goes on to criticize the current state education funding formulas because the “high ratio of state to local revenue may mean the funding system is equitable only in that it provides inadequate funding levels everywhere. A low ratio is a clearer signal that the school funding system relies on local capacity and whether minimally adequate or not, is very likely inequitable,” (Strange et al., 2012, p. #). Due to higher operating costs, increased transportation costs, specialized programs for at-risk youth, and attempts at providing competitive teacher salaries, local tax dollars do not fill the funding gap left by state education finance structures. When states place the financial burden on rural communities which have lower economic capacity due to lower property values, declines in both agriculture and industry, and shrinking tax bases the inequities for student learning are exacerbated. The authors point out that socio-economic diversity is the most relevant factor related to academic achievement as measured by standardized test scores at both the state and national level. This combined with a rural student high school graduation rate of approximately 77%, suggest that state funding systems must rethink and redesign policies to address the growing achievement gap between white and non-white youth in America.

Related research indicates that the federal government has attempted to address the growing inequities found in the rural school districts through the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislative mandates of 2001 (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, & Shapley, 2007). Directing supplemental federal educational dollars to rural schools struggling to meet the requirements of NCLB required that policymakers first defined rural. “The U.S. Census Bureau defines rural areas as open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 people…(this) definition is the foundation on which other definitions are built” (Arnold et al., 2007, p. #). According to Arnold and his colleagues, the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) created two funding programs designed to specifically address the needs of rural and small schools that lacked the resources to meet the requirements of NCLB such as recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers as well as providing alternative timelines for schools to meet this requirement. The Small Rural School Achievement (SRSA) Program districts which met federal guidelines for additional funding to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), applied directly to the U.S. Department of Education; whereas the Rural and Low-Income Schools (RLIS) Program participants received funding through sub-grants allocated by their respective state offices of public education. However, Arnold and his colleagues (2007) argued that the federal legislation for REAP did not provide a substantive level of personnel and funding needed by schools and districts that qualified for the SRSA and RLIS programs. Additionally, the lack of meaningful monetary supports for professional development hindered rural educators who were “unaccustomed to working with English language learners” (p. #) and other student subgroups who were expected to meet the high stakes testing requirements of the NCLB mandates (Johnson & Strange 2005 as cited in Arnold et al., 2007). Although, all rural school districts shared common limitations when attempting to meet AYP mandates, the SRSA program recipients were concentrated in 31 northern and central region states and 80 percent of the schools participating in the RLIS program were located in 16 southern states (Farmer et al, 2006 as cited in Arnold et al., 2007).

In their evaluation of the federal SRSA and RLIS programs, Farmer, Leung, and Banks (2006) examined the extent to which the two subprograms of the REAP legislative initiative impacted the educational outcomes of rural schools nationwide. Their findings highlighted that “schools eligible to participate in REAP make up only a segment of rural schools in America, those are among the most challenged by the demands of No Child Left Behind” and “this segment of rural schools served nearly 4.5 rural children, or almost 10% of America’s school age population,” (Farmer et al., 2006, p. #). Within the subgroup of SRSA sample used for their study, Farmer and his colleagues reported 78% of these schools meeting the 95% level of participation for total populations and subpopulations while meeting their preset proficiency rate as well. In the RLIS sample, only 65.2% made their preset Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals and these districts and their respective schools served populations with greater numbers of students of color, greater numbers of students from low-income families, and had higher student-teacher ratios as compared to the SRSA populations. The authors referenced previous researchers who looked at the importance of recognizing the regional differences among rural schools and their communities and how diversity, socio economics, past political and economic inequities, and geography play out in the level of federal and state funding needed for rural schools to support all students’ academic achievement and future aspirations (Jimerson, 2004; Johnson & Strange, 2004; Sherwood, 2000 as cited in Farmer 2006).

The regional differences inherent in the rural schools and districts in the United States, as noted above, often play out in the contentious debates around school consolidation movements (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005). The statewide movements to consolidate small schools and districts into larger countywide districts for economies of scale purposes have been promoted especially in the South and Southwestern regions where declining enrollments and budget constraints cause “state policy makers and reformers (to) continue to debate and even promote issues of school consolidation,” (Bard et al., 2005, p. #)). Consolidation proponents and reformers continue to scrutinize rural schools and districts for their inability to meet NCLB standardized testing and highly qualified teacher requirements, their relatively high cost of operation, and their lack of broader curriculum offerings to students (Bard et al., 2005). However, evidence that school consolidation reduces expenditures and improves student academic achievement has not been documented. In contrast, though, data in support of the short term benefits of maintaining small schools in rural districts includes evidence of “higher numbers of students involved in extracurricular activities, higher numbers of students taking academic courses, more attention by teachers due to lower pupil teacher ratio, and students who had close connection to their communities,” (Bard et al., 2005, p. #). According to Bard and his colleagues, these short term benefits lead to long term investments in both rural communities and society as a whole: higher percentages of high school graduates reduces the negative long-term economic impact equated with high school drop-out rates which include higher incarceration rates, higher use of social welfare services, and higher use of unemployment resources. Therefore, “small schools help increase the number of economically productive adults and cut government costs,” (The Rural School and Community Trust, 2004 as cited in Bard et al., 2005). Thus school consolidation movements based on “economies of scale” are incongruous with research supporting smaller school size, smaller class size, challenging curriculum, and more highly qualified teachers as key to student achievement for the vulnerable rural student populations especially those in the South and Southwest (Bard et al., 2005).

In addition to the school consolidation movements in states with high percentages of rural populations, rural schools and districts have explored restructuring approaches as a means to improving academic achievement as measured by NCLB legislative testing mandates (Maxwell, Huggins, & Scheurich, 2010). Maxwell and her colleagues completed a case study of a rural high school with a student population of 350 located in a southern state that opted to implement the Accelerated Schools Project (ASP) Model (citation) developed by Stanford economics and education professor, Henry Levin, who was looking for “solutions to increase the achievement of students who were determined to be ‘at risk’,” (Levin, 2005 as cited in Maxwell et al., 2010). The district level proponents of this model attempted to address the six year period of shifting community demographics in which the “percentage of African American students” and “disadvantaged students” was steadily increasing as the “percentage of White students” was steadily decreasing” with a the Hispanic student population remaining steady (Maxwell et al., 2010). The shifting demographics and subsequent decline in standardized test scores allowed this rural district and school to apply for and receive a state grant in 2005. The “restructuring” requirements of the grant mandated that a new principal be hired, that 50% of the teachers would be replaced with alternatively certified teachers, that the ASP Model be the reform framework, and an external consultant would be hired to guide teachers through the development of professional learning communities (Maxwell et al., 2010). The staff members interviewed by Maxwell and her colleagues claimed that “the PLC [Professional Learning Community] ultimately gain(ed) the most strength, power, and influence as the staff began to work as a cohesive unit, leading to the PLC ultimately being given primary credit for the turnaround by those involved,” (Maxwell, et al., 2010). After three years of implementation of the ASP model, standardized test scores for all student subpopulations increased and in 2008, the school met AYP (Maxwell et al., 2010).

Chance and Segura’s (2009) case study also suggested that an adapted business model for school reform positively contributed to “significant improvement and sustained achievement over a three year period” in a rural high school. The “conceptual framework of OD (Organizational Development and Transformative Leadership) focused on the leadership behaviors of the principal and the interactions among leaders and followers that occurred,” (Chance & Segura, 2009). Similar to the previous example of the ASP Model, the high school in this case study hired a new principal and experienced a large teacher turnover rate in the initial stages of the implementation of their reform model. Changes in high school proficiency test scores, achievement of Adequate Yearly Progress (NCLB standardized testing mandate), and attendance and graduation rates were used to measure growth during the implementation of the OD framework. As with the majority of rural districts and schools in the United States, the administration and teaching staff faced the educational challenges that come with high levels of “child poverty (Farmer et al., 2006; Huang & Howley, 1991; Johnson & Strange, 2007 as cited in Chance & Segura, 2009), limited resources for materials and professional development required to meet the educational needs of specialized student subgroups (Hickey & Harris, 2005; Howley & Howley, 2005 as cited in Chance & Segura, 2009) and inability to attract and retain high quality teachers who have appropriate training and credentials (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005; Holloway, 2002; Lowe, 2006 as cited in Chance and Segura, 2009). Chance and Segura also reported that the principal in their case study focused her time and energy on working collaboratively with her staff to develop a consensus building model. The principal promoted and expected increased collective efforts in the implementation of research based instruction such as sheltered instruction for English language learners, cooperative learning activities, AP courses, tutoring sessions, student portfolios, and a modified block schedule. Additional structured, dedicated time to plan and reflect on student progress and pedagogical practices also became standard practice at this high school (Chance & Segura, 2009). Moreover, the staff and principal built on the already existing “relationships and contextual factors associated with rural schools (which) contributed to developing successful collaborative efforts that, in turn, led to improved student achievement”; however, “the responsibility falls on those with more authority to initiate the actions” required “to create and build professional trust in their respective school sites,” (Chance & Segura, 2009).

Effective educational policies and reforms at the state and district levels impacting rural communities recognize that the relationships and autonomy of small schools and small class sizes contribute to teacher satisfaction in rural school districts (Monk, 2007). However, teacher satisfaction does not directly translate to an ability to serve the wide range of needs within those schools. Furthermore, the unique needs of children living in poverty, children of color, English language learners, and students with special education needs requires exemplary teachers who have the background and expertise needed to provide all rural students with a quality education in settings already lacking access to resources and supports (Monk, 2007). At the same time, “teacher experience is emerging as one of the most important predictors of teaching effectiveness” (Rockoff, 2004; Harris & Sass, 2006 as cited in Monk, 2007). Without highly qualified, experienced teachers, adequate levels of state funding, and curricular offerings of college preparation courses especially in math and science students who traditionally fail to meet state and federal standardized test requirements fall farther behind (Monk, 2007). Because rural districts must compete with suburban and urban districts for highly qualified and experienced teachers, they cannot offer these teachers competitive salaries needed to recruit and retain those credentialed in the shortage areas such as math, science, and special education (Gibbs, 2000 as cited in Monk, 2007). Teachers and students alike face the comparative disadvantage created by the “lower fiscal capacity in rural areas, coupled with only limited efforts by states to offset the effects of poverty through equalizing grant-in-aid programs,” (Monk, 2007). With the economic realities of the 21st, all rural youth will need to go beyond a secondary education in order to find living wage employment in the changing industrial climate. Obstacles such as low levels of parental college attendance, limited or nonexistent college preparation courses, and teachers lacking high levels of academic attainment hinder student aspirations for pursing and obtaining postsecondary training and education (Gibbs, 2000 as cited in Monk, 2007).

Malhoit (2005) found further examples of inadequacies created by state level educational funding system by looking at recent “school funding lawsuits, (where) a number of state courts have found a link between education funding and student achievement.” These lawsuits highlighted the reality that financial limitations hinder rural districts in their efforts “to attract teachers to work in ‘hard-to-serve’ and ‘hard-to-staff’ areas of a state” (Malhoit, 2005). Unfortunately, state dependency on local funding for rural education decreases the capacity of small districts to finance badly needed investments in high quality teachers and learning programs (Malhoit, 2005). Adequately funding research-based educational programs such as preschool and full-day kindergarten within proximity to the communities they serve and class size limits of 15 students per teacher, are proven strategies that increase academic engagement and achievement for children of poverty, children of color, English language learners, and students with special education needs. Additionally, rural schools and districts depend on “traditional state funding mechanisms [which] do not sufficiently reflect the ‘real’ cost of educating students in most rural settings” because they are more reflective of political compromise than the actual needs of students in rural settings (Malhoit, 2005).

In response to growing concerns over inequitable educational finance systems, several southern states implemented the *evidence based approach to school finance adequacy* recently used by school finance consultants in Arkansas and Kentucky (Picus, Odden, & Fermanich, 2003 as cited in Malhoit, 2005). The evidence based approach to school finance adequacy is a model that “presents a set of component parts of educational strategies that leading education researchers have concluded impact student learning” and further “analyzes the education efficacy and cost of each component from a rural perspective,” (Malhoit, 2005). The Arkansas and Kentucky school finance models have yet to take hold on a larger scale thus have not slowed the consolidation movement’s efforts to build evidence that small schools are inefficient and ineffective. Malhoit believes that moreover, these reformers continue to deny the reality that the so called failures of rural schools and districts are symptomatic of the historical under-funding due to punitive state funding formulas (Malhoit, 2005). In order for true educational funding equity and high quality education to occur in rural schools and districts, a “broad spectrum of stakeholders” of “grassroots people” will need to push for a “justice funding framework” to compensate for generations of neglect by state level policymakers (Malhoit, 2005).

The state level educational funding policies addressing rural schools and districts cannot ignore the direct relationship between the educational outcomes of rural youth and the economic well-being of their communities of origin. According to Gibbs, “policymakers should take a close look at the entire cycle of educational attainment, labor force development, and reinvestment in the community’s educational infrastructure—or lack of it.” (Gibbs, 2000)

The economic realities of the 21st century require that all secondary level students in rural communities receive a rigorous and challenging curriculum necessary to prepare them for productive membership in the modern workplace. Investment in rural education attracts businesses and professionals who seek potential employees who have the technological skills, problem solving abilities, language and mathematical literacy, and work habits necessary for their businesses to be productive and grow. Gibbs goes on to say in turn, the fiscal capacity of a growing industrial tax base along with accompanying increases in property values, supplements the inadequate state level funding for rural schools that fails to cover costs associated with competitive teacher salaries, curriculum, professional development, building maintenance, technology initiatives, and transportation. Moreover, investment in technology in rural schools is critical because “computer use in the workplace has accelerated, and rural firms appear to be adopting high-tech production and management methods” thus students entering the workforce must be equipped to compete for employment with firms within their communities as agricultural and traditional local industries are disappearing (Gibbs, 2000). “Places that can attract highly educated residents who have a social and economic stake in the quality of the local school system can garner not only the community capital that leads to school improvements, but also the interpersonal and institutional ties that reinforce the desire for education among youth,” (Gibbs, 2000).

The benefits for rural youth who experience relationships with community members and business leaders is documented in research conducted by Shamah (2011). Her research explored how a student’s sense of purpose impacts his or her ability to navigate both the academic settings of rural schools and the community beyond the school. Shamah (2011) states “(y)oung people who struggle with school have an additional challenge of connecting with peers and adults who value them outside school,” which can limit their exposure to work experiences and cultural opportunities where they interact to “construct their identity through interactions with their environments, families, and communities (intergenerational relationships, small schools, productive work opportunities)” as a step toward “identity development” (Shamah, 2011). Shamah found that rural high school students with a high sense of purpose did come from families in which at least one parent had a bachelor’s degree and that these students had an overall higher level of participation in both school and community activities as compared to students who identified as having a low sense of purpose. Students identified as having a low sense of purpose did not have a parent with a bachelor’s degree and had a low overall participation level in both school and community activities. The quality of the participation in both school and community activities and work impacted student sense of purpose. Participation in school sponsored sports positively related to a student’s increased sense of purpose; work and community experiences that allowed for intergenerational and career exposure were also shown to increase a student’s sense of purpose in rural communities (Shamah, 2011). Previous research cited by Shamah supports that “(o)ut of school activities have been linked to academic success and positive developmental pathways,” (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003 as cited in Shamah, 2011). Thus communities in which both formal and informal school-community partnerships are fostered may promote rural youth to better establish their sense of purpose needed for healthy developmental transitions to adulthood (Shamah, 2001).

Alleman and Holly (2013) observe “that improved opportunity for all students through high quality education maximizes life choices for individuals and may offer a key local resource for future community vitality.” In this study, the authors explored the positive relationships formed through both formal and informal school-community partnerships found in rural communities that “promote schools’ educational goals for student achievement and postsecondary aspirations,” and “promote postsecondary readiness and ambition among low-income students,” (Alleman & Holly, 2013). The study highlights the active role community partners can play in supporting rural students through both direct systems of support such as mentoring, tutoring, and “supplementary learning experiences that build self-efficacy” which can take place in work environments, cultural activities, and/or language groups and religious communities (Alleman & Holly, 2013). Furthermore, community members may provide students with access to exploring local college campuses and career pathways related to the professions and businesses found in rural communities. “The close and informal social circles that typify rural life in our case districts carried by word of need quickly” and the “strong sense of ownership and responsibility for students” leads to “a generation of young people prepared to contribute to society and a school system that may be a selling point to business owners, developers, and professionals who may be attracted to the area as a result,” (Alleman & Holly, 2013).

Metis Associates, Inc. (1995) documented programs and strategies employed by rural school districts that “have been successful in raising aspirations of their students, families, and if possible, communities in general.” The school districts targeted for this report were considered to be in communities facing high levels of child poverty, low property values, low per capita income, and low expenditure per pupil (Metis Associates, Inc. , 1995). Both school-based and community-based initiatives were found to be successful by these districts and could be implemented with minimal resources due to the already well-established school-community partnerships and the more autonomous and flexible environments of smaller schools in the more isolated districts. Programmatic support from local businesses enhanced and supplemented the classroom experiences of rural students by allowing community members to share their professional knowledge and financial support for field trips to both cultural and college/career related programs. Furthermore, the staff in these small schools reported initiating strategies such as outreach to local higher education programs to increase their professional expertise and to increase student distance learning opportunities through technology based classroom innovations. Additionally, school administrators cited the importance of collaborative decision-making models in their buildings as well as a commitment to high quality professional development and incentives for teachers to seek outside professional development (Metis Associates, 1995).

McConnell (1994) also documented positive strategies that benefit rural youth in low income communities. McConnell reported a lack of resources and the isolation inherent in rural schools and districts which required an educational professional to take initiative to build community alliances. In building and strengthening already existing community partnerships, she realized she could serve more effectively the range of student needs characteristic of small schools such as limited parental involvement, poverty, and low academic achievement. She also noted that being in constant proximity to the close knit rural community allowed her to build trust with and gain “invaluable information” about students from community and family members and “to use this pool of information to work within the existing system to its benefit,”. McConnell also recognized the ethical position she maintained by respecting rural familial and community ties and traditions while at the same time encouraging and mentoring her students to imagine themselves in postsecondary programs which would take them away from their community in the short term but benefit their community in the long term (McConnell, 1994). She also stated in her paper that her autonomy in the small school setting allowed for a “freedom to explore our ideas without much opposition” and that “rural schools and their consequent isolation necessitates that change be brought to them,” (McConnell, 1994) which required an active commitment on her part to “form systematic networks with other rural school counselors both in an out of our regions,” (McConnell, 1994). The author wrote that she regularly and consistently built upon the resources, initiatives, and relationships in her rural school and community in an ongoing effort to counter “(b)oth real and imagined poverty” experienced by rural youth that led to their “lowering expectations and self-esteem” and creation of “personal immobility,” (McConnell, 1994).

The research of Petrin, Schafft, and Meece (2014) also explored the roles of schools and educators in relation to the decisions of rural youth to remain, leave (outmigration or leavers), or leave and return (returners) to their communities (Petrin et al.,2014). As with McConnell, Petrin and his colleagues found that communities recognized the importance of youth outmigration as a means to sustain and even build economic capacity and vitality when these ‘Leavers’ returned with academic, professional, and experiential attributes which can contribute to the overall well-being of their communities of origin (Petrin et al., 2014). Perceptions that educators promoted the outmigration of the highly successful students in rural schools was not supported by the findings of this study, but rather the documented evidence pointed to student perceptions of economic limitations in their communities as the motivating factor for them choosing to leave their communities. Moreover, “the most academically high-achieving students had among the highest community attachment, since it is in the home community and school that those rural students have found success, have largely positive associations, and have received consistent support and attention from adults,” (Petrin et al., 2014) The positive relationships formed between rural youth and their respective communities raises “questions about rural schools as potential drivers of economic development in so far as they are able to develop meaningful relationships with local employers, suggest to students economic opportunities available to them locally, and engage in strategic workforce development and community engagement (Harmon & Schafft, 2009 as cited in Petrin et al., 2014).” The results of this study questioned whether outmigration of rural youth is more a function of “a systematic underinvestment at the regional and national levels in rural America more broadly” and not the schools and educators as implied in previous published literature (Petrin et al., 2014).

Hardre, Sullivan, and Crowson (2009) examined the dynamic role rural context of educational settings played in the perceptions rural youth held about their academic achievement and future aspirations. Hardre and her colleagues studied the “relationship between students’ perceptions of their rural school and community environment and their perceptions about themselves,” (Hardre, 2009). Their research concluded that “the more rural students saw the usefulness and value of what they are learning in school, and saw it as contributing toward achieving their goals, the more likely they were to exhibit an interest in school, put forth effort, and exhibit intentions to graduate and go on to postsecondary opportunities,” (Hardre et al., 2009). It is this instrumentality (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Sansone & Smith, 2000 as cited in Hardre et al., 2009) in combination with a student’s perceived competence when challenged with rigorous and meaningful curriculum which motivates youth to engage actively in their academic progress and aspire to continue their individual postsecondary educational goals (Hardre et al., 2009). The authors also referenced previous research that claimed within the rural context teachers and administrators have a responsibility to help rural youth “shape uniquely appropriate goals and aspirations that fit with their values and through which they can contribute to their communities,” (Howley, Harmon, & Leopold, 1996; Lemke, 1994 as cited in Hardre et al., 2009). Without this explicit guidance for rural youth, the “conflict between educational goals and their family connections”, students are “more likely to have lower educational aspirations and to delay postsecondary education,” (Hektner, 1995 as cited in Hardre, 2009). This study also concluded that the individual connections teachers have with rural youth and the learning environment they create “are powerful motivational tools in the eyes of these rural high school students,” (Hardre et al., 2005).

Irvin, Meece, Byun, and Farmer (2010) published their study that examined “the relationship of school characteristics and schooling experiences to the educational achievement and aspirations of youth from high-poverty rural communities”. Their work examined the ongoing and troubling evidence that high percentages of students of color in southern states are not completing high school and that the numerous historical economic and educational inequities in these states contributed to the sense of failure often associated with rural schools in the Southeast (Irvin et al., 2010). This research documented the benefits of small schools and small class sizes for student populations which have been historically marginalized due to race, economic factors, English language learning needs, and special education identification. In these smaller, close knit schools, a sense of belonging can support the academic achievement and engagement of youth considered at-risk (National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004 as cited in Irvin et al., 2010). Additionally, previous research indicated that rigorous academic programs aligned with college preparation activities increased “academic self-concept” for rural youth from high poverty communities and that small class sizes also contributed to student achievement and aspirations due to the “longstanding and supportive student-teacher relationships, and close community relationships which are characteristic of rural communities,” (Burney and Cross, 2006; Lyson 2002; Schafft et al. 2006 as cited in Irvin et al., 2010).

Growing concerns nationwide about the academic achievement gap for students of color was highlighted in Williams (2003). Williams reported that “2.8 million or 20% of (rural students) are non-Caucasian, children of color with continued growth likely due to natural increase, in-migration, and stemming of out-migration,” (Beale, 1999 as cited in Williams, 2003). Furthermore, “like their non-rural counterparts, rural schools have yet to attain an acceptable level of success in educating and closing the achievement gap across various racial and economic sub-groups of this diverse student population.” (Williams, 2003). Rural poverty and lower average incomes of rural community members exacerbates the discrepancy for students of color especially in the “Deep South, Southwest, and American Indian reservations in the North Plains—where family incomes and parent education levels are consistently lower than their White counterparts,” (Williams, 2003). Both standardized high-stakes testing results and SAT scores for rural youth of color illustrate the negative impact of inadequate financial support for instructional resources and curriculum programs designed to meet the cultural needs of students (Williams, 2003). Williams’ findings that “a number of states rely heavily on local property taxes to supplement state and federal funding” but “(b)ecause rural communities tend to have higher poverty rates, lower property values and less economic development” curricular and extra-curricular offerings are restricted and the quality of teachers to deliver instruction within in their field of credentialing does not meet the needs of rural students and their communities (Williams, 2003). In contrast to the funding challenges inherent to rural districts and rural schools, rural education research continues to document that “(s)mall schools and districts give impoverished students an advantage that enables them to overcome many of the disadvantages of being poor,” (Howley et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 2002; Stern, 1994 as cited in Williams, 2003). Furthermore, movements toward a model of Place-Based Education or emancipatory practice is being developed to create connections between “school and community through a high-quality, culturally relevant curriculum” in opposition to the rigid and unrealistic high-stakes testing standards imposed on rural schools and districts.

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Closing the achievement gap: Rural schools. *CSR Connection.*

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You will see in the document that there are many comments and corrections. You have work to do to get to the quality and style of writing that will be required in your dissertation. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Learn to be neutral. A literature review is not a persuasive paper. Your eye should be on understanding all points of view on a topic and presenting those to the reader.
2. Stop using direct quotes. Just stop. If you do find a situation where they are necessary, then they must be accompanied by a page number citation.
3. One of the techniques that you have to develop for review writing is to let the reader know that you are continuing to talk about the same author. If the text doesn’t relay this information then it begins to sound like your voice instead of the author’s. You don’t do this by continually inserting the same citation over and over again. That is distracting. The way to solve the problem is to include clues in the text. You might write, “the authors continued to say” or “also found in this study.”
4. Do not use “as cited in.” There is almost never a reason why this would be necessary at the doctoral level. When an author is referenced in another paper, go find the original work by that author. Using secondary sources is weak scholarship at the doctoral level especially, and it reduces the professionalism of your writing.

Teach yourself to follow trails. If an author discusses a related topic then go find out more about it. As a scholar you have to learn to clarify everything you read. What are the assumptions that an author brings to the work? What is being left out of the study? What are the parameters of the study that may preclude related topics?

You have a good start, but you have much to do and can’t let up. The only way to learn to do this kind of writing is practice and getting feedback from good writers in your cohort and your professors. It would be good for you to have a writing buddy who can review and critique your work.

Dr. Carroll