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Abstract

Podium

Major English Education

Faculty Mentor: Rebekah Buchanan

Rethinking Rural Reform: How Modern Efforts to Aid Rural Communities Are Failing

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This research proposal stems from a section of my undergraduate honors thesis titled, "Issues of Rurality in Education, Policymaking, and Socioeconomics," that I am completing. As many educators, researchers, and advocacy groups continue to engage in invaluable work to address the inequities that rural schools and communities endure, this research aims to critique the focus of reform that provides only temporary relief and more often avoids the macro-level causations behind rural struggle. Only when fundamental issues surrounding rurality are directly addressed in legislation and reform efforts is change a mere possibility. Rural students deserve an equitable education, and legislators and advocates do them and their communities a disservice by emphasizing short term solutions that do little to change issues of poverty, racism, healthcare, and access to education.

After completing interviews in addition to extensive research on issues of rurality, this study comes to multiple conclusions. Perhaps most importantly, common state and federal reform measures extended to rural communities in the form of competitive grant money do not critically change the forces that persist and will persist in creating greater difficulties and socioeconomic struggles for rural areas. Reform based upon private business ownership will not elicit any change when communities continue grappling with emigration, decreased social and school funding, lack of access to food and healthcare, and the disappearance of jobs. This study questions the sustainability of such reform; it only temporarily forestalls pervasive rural decline.