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ABSTRACT

Since small school problems are magnified in rural areas and since small rural schools have suffered, consequently, from the consolidation syndrome, it is important to acknowledge the fact that due to geographical limitations some rural areas cannot consolidate and others simply prefer the small school environment. It should also be recognized that there are both strengths and weaknesses inherent in the small rural school. Weaknesses attributable to small rural schools include: (1) poor organizational structures; (2) difficulties in the recruitment and retention of quality personnel; (3) inadequate facilities; (4) curriculum deficiences; (5) inadequate financial support. Strengths attributable to the small rural school include: (1) an homogeneous sociocultural background; (2) the potential for close-knit educational organization; (3) close student/teacher relationships; (4) community involvement; and (5) a classroom environment conducive to innovative techniques. While the problems of finance must be met at the local, State, and Federal levels, solutions to many of the problems of the small rural school can probably best be found by coupling inherent strengths with innovative educational practices which encompass use of: the intermediate unit; the shared services concept; media and technology; mobile units; and in-service programs. (Author/JC)

STRENGTHENING THE SMALL RURAL SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Since small school problems are magnified in rural areas and since small rural schools have suffered, consequently, from the consolidation syndrome, it is important to acknowledge the fact that due to geographical limitations some rural areas cannot consolidate and others simply prefer the small school environment. It should also be recognized that there are both strengths and weaknesses inherent in the small rural school. Weaknesses attributable to small rural schools include: 1) poor organizational structures; 2) difficulties in the recruitment and retention of quality personnel; 3) inadequate facilities; 4) curriculum deficiencies; 5) inadequate financial support. Strengths attributable to the small rural school include: 1) a homogeneous socio-cultural background; 2) the potential for close-knit educational organization; 3) close student/teacher relationships; 4) community involvement; and 5) a classroom environment conducive to innovative techniques. While the problems of finance must be met at the local, State, and Federal levels, solutions to many of the problems of the small rural school can probably best be found by coupling inherent strengths with innovative educational practices which encompass use of: the intermediate unit; the shared services concept; media and technology; mobilized curriculum; and in-service programs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

For many years now, the operation of the small school has come under severe criticism. Most of the critics have had a singular solution to the problems of the small school--that of consolidation. In many cases, however, consolidation has proved less than feasible and/or even reasonable. In the first place, there are areas where geographical limitations make it physically impossible to consolidate. Secondly, there are communities, both rural and urban, which very much want to keep their schools small. For example, the private and/or church supported school typically does not want consolidation. There are also many small public schools which, for one reason or another, revere their small school environment. While there are certainly recognized weaknesses in the small school operation, there are also inherent strengths which are not so readily recognized.

As the problems of the small school are magnified in a rural area, the small rural schools have suffered immensely from the consolidation syndrome. The small rural school is typically faced with problems of organization; staff and curriculum deficiencies; inadequate facilities; and inadequate financial support. On the other hand, the socio-cultural homogeneity of the small rural community is such that it affords unique opportunity for close-knit educational organization and community involvement. Socio-cultural homogeneity

and a small school also afford opportunity for close student/teacher relationships and innovative classroom management. While the small school problems of finance, staff, and curriculum must be met, solutions can, perhaps, best be found by coupling the strengths of the small rural school with innovative educational practices. Therefore, consideration should be given to organizational changes which encompass use the intermediate unit and/or shared services concept; use of media and technology; use of shared in-service programs for administrators, teachers, and counselors; and use of a mobilized curriculum.

The improvement of small rural school programs has been advocated for years. As early as 1944 the White House Conference on Rural Education recommended that the public should provide each rural child with the right to a satisfactory, modern, elementary and secondary education which would bridge the gap between home and school and adult life. While this recommendation is now beginning to be realized via nationwide programs, there is still much room for improvement. For example, in A Small N Study of Federal Aid in Rural and Suburban School Districts, Michel (1973) found that district size was a significant predictor of Federal aid and that neither total assessed evaluation nor assessed valuation per pupil indicated any relation to Federal aid response. Additionally, Edington indicated in a paper presented to the Science and Man in the Americas Meeting in Mexico City (1973) that even though there

has been a worldwide trend toward development of better educational programs for isolated peoples, the programs for the isolated school were still significantly behind those for urban and suburban schools in nearly every country in the world. Foster and Sheffield (1974) reported the same imbalance in the educational programs for rural and urban populations in the World Book of Education in 1974. As these and other studies indicate, there is a measurable difference between the education afforded a rural and an urban student, and since most rural students attend small schools, it is clear that this imbalance extends to the small rural school.

Until recently the majority of the small school literature, both pro and con, has been opinion, rather than research, oriented. In recent years, however, hard data have been collected on programs in small rural schools. Consequently, there is now a sound basis for rational evaluation of small rural school operations. Utilizing hard data in an effort to counter the opinionated findings of the past, it is the purpose of this paper to: 1) document the strengths and weaknesses of small rural school programs; 2) identify some of the more promising educational programs which can be found in the small rural schools of today; and 3) suggest the means by which the educational programs of small rural schools can be improved and strengthened.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL SCHOOLS AND SMALL SCHOOL POPULATIONS

Small School Characteristics

It is extremely difficult to determine just what constitutes a small school. A school which may seem small to people living in highly populated areas may appear quite large to those living in the more isolated areas of the country. There is some consensus, however, that a school which is not large enough to provide a program for the majority of its students constitutes a "small school". A number of professional educators feel that the definition of a small school include those which have a student population of 800 to 1,000 at the secondary level and 300 to 400 at the elementary level. Nonetheless, the North Central Association classifies small high schools as those having a student population of 300 or less. Obviously, the size of the small school will vary from district to district. Consequently, the problems of the small school will also vary, for there is a distinct difference between the school that is almost large enough to accomodate a complete educational program and the school that is so small it can hardly function.

Just as the size of the small school varies, so does its location. American small schools can be found anywhere from the middle of an urban center to an isolated mountain hamlet or desert village. However, since most small schools are found in rural areas, the majority of the small school literature deals with the publicly

supported rural isolated school. Although most small schools are publicly supported, there are increasing numbers of small private schools, particularly in the South where integration has given rise to a number of "segregated academies" (Palmer, 1974). There are also increasing numbers of small "neighborhood" and/or "store front" schools which can be found in the urban centers of the United States. The small school, then, is not unique to rural America and can be found in every state and almost every community in the nation.

Given the variations in size and location of the small school, it is only reasonable to assume a certain variation in approach to small school program development. That is, it is important that each small school approach educational program development from its own particular frame of reference, for as Broady and Broady (1974) assert, it is important that the educators developing programs in small schools consider their programs unique rather than handicapped. Too often the educator has tried to modify programs which have had success in larger schools to fit the needs of a smaller school. Such modification is never satisfactory, as a program must be designed and tailored to meet the specific needs of a specific school in order to adequately serve its students.

Characteristics of Small School Populations

Most of the available data on the small school student describes those living in rural areas. However, since a great many of the small urban and suburban schools are private, both parochial and

non-parochial, it is probably safe to assume that the majority of these students come from a somewhat higher socio-economic background than their rural counterparts. Generally speaking, the socio-economic background of rural small school student is considerably less than advantaged.

Most of the research on the rural student has come from rural sociologists associated with the colleges of agriculture in our land-grant universities. There is, however, a great deal of data on the racial composition of students attending small rural schools. Large numbers of Mexican and Native Americans, for example, attend small schools in the Southwest, while there is a large black population in the small rural schools of the South (Upham and Jimenez, 1973; Jimenez and Upham, 1974). It is interesting to note that slightly over 41% of all American youth in rural areas live in the south (Upham and Jimenez, 1973). It would be a misconception, however, to assume all the students in rural areas were of one minority or another, for a majority are of white Anglo Saxon decent and are distributed throughout the nation. The numerous rural ethnic groups do, however, present problems for the rural small schools. Knowlton (1974) hypothesized that a major cause of current poverty among Spanish Americans in Northern New Mexico stems from the imposition of alien Anglo American legal, political, social, and economic systems, systems, imposed shortly after the U.S. occupation of the southwest, which the rural village people have never completely understood.

This same phenomenon may also be operative among other rural minority populations in other parts of the nation.

A great many studies have indicated that students from small schools, do not perform as well scholastically in high school or college as those from larger and urban schools. In a study of students at Stanford University and the University of Oregon, Barbara Feller (1974) found slight rural/urban differences, regardless of sex and social class, in both high school and college performance. Matthias (1972) also indicated that graduates from small schools experience less success in college than do graduates from larger schools. While these are but a few of many such findings, they are indicative of the challenge facing the small rural school.

There are also indications that rural and small school students are not as well prepared for the world of work as students from larger schools who enjoy the advantage of a broader curriculum. There has been extensive research on the occupational and educational aspirations and expectations of rural youth, especially in the South, and it has been found that generally rural youth have lower educational and occupational expectations and aspirations than urban youth (Kuvlesky, 1971; Drabick, 1974). However, Kuvlesky indicated that the aspirations and expectations of rural youth are rising, though they are still far behind those of their urban counterparts. At present it is very difficult to discern whether the lower occupational and educational aspirations/expectations of rural youth are attributable

to the rural setting, to the small school, or to both. However, since large numbers of rural youth attend small rural schools, this phenomenon may be interpreted as characteristic of many small school students, regardless of location. It is interesting to note that Cosby (1969) indicated that the more disadvantaged populations have extremely high aspirations, since such findings are at odds with research expectations. Since some researchers have found that sex differences also exert an influence upon occupational and educational aspirations/expectations, it is likely that the small school and/or rurality account for only a part of the explanation underlying the lower occupational and educational aspirations/expectations of rural youth.

Gererally, then, the student from the small rural school is at a slight disadvantage when compared to his urban counterpart in the areas of scholastic achievement and educational and occupational aspirations/expectations, particularly if he is a member of a minority group. While it is difficult to ascertain whether these phenomena are due to the size of the school or the influence of the environment, there are some indications that changes in school environment, structure, and organization can positively influence the small school student.

III. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SMALL RURAL SCHOOL

A review of the literature which identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the small rural school reveals several significant factors. First, evaluations of small schools are generally based upon comparisons with larger schools (Gividen, 1963; Jackson, 1966), the implication being, of course, that larger or medium-sized schools constitute the desirable norm. Secondly, the strengths and weaknesses attributed to the small rural school are invariably interrelated. That is, a given characteristic of the small rural school may constitute, at one and the same time, both a strength and a weakness. Thirdly, the various discussions listing small school strengths and weaknesses include numerous duplications (Clements, 1970). Therefore, it seems advisable to approach each characteristic of the small school as an entity unto itself, dealing with the particular strengths and weakensses of that characteristic simultaneously. Finally, in any discussion of rural small school strengths and weaknesses, it is important to bear in mind the following fundamental challenges: 1) to take full advantage of available rural opportunities; 2) to realize the limitations of the small school; and 3) to be aware of responsibility not only to rural America, but also to an America that has no division between rural and urban communities (Edington and Stans, 1973). In view of these considerations, then, the following presentation identifies five major small school characteristics and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Organizational Patterns and Characteristics

The organizational patterns of the small school constitute both strengths and weaknesses. Organizational strengths are operative at the local level where the organization is quite small and informal in structure, while organizational weaknesses are operative at the broader level where the organization must relate to the state educational systems.

In a discussion of the organization of Alaskan schools, Frank Darnell (1972) clarified the weakness inherent in the relationship between the small rural school and state educational systems. There are, in effect, Darnell states, three separate Alaskan school systems serving rural residents--1) the locally operated school systems; 2) the over 100 small schools operated by state school systems; and 3) the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) operated school systems. These varied organizational patterns have been a source of frustration for the Alaskan educator. However, there have been recent movements to eliminate the state operated schools, putting them under the control of local school boards, and the BIA is also moving in the direction of local control. Alaska is not unique, for the problems inherent in the state/local relationship can be found in most states which have small isolated schools. Logistics and the orientation of supervisory personnel in the state departments of education make it extremely difficult to establish a working relationship between the staff of an isolated school and the state educational systems.

The less than formal atmosphere and the relative freedom from administrative bureaucracy constitute some of the organizational strengths inherent in the rural small school (Isenberg, 1967; Charles, 1969). A potential for flexibility and close-knit operation are other organizational strengths of the small school which are generally not found in the larger systems (Catskill Area Project in Small Schools, 1959; Oregon State Board of Education, 1970). The ease with which an innovative curriculum may be implemented and the autonomous atmosphere which promotes such innovation are further examples of organizational strengths found in small rural school systems. The Oregon State Board of Education has provided leadership in promoting this kind of innovative atmosphere, as evidenced by the work of the Oregon Small Schools Project (Burcham, 1971).

An organizational pattern which may be classified as both a strength and a weakness inherent in the small rural school is the close relationship that teachers, administrators, and students have with their school board members, a phenomenon which becomes an impossibility in larger communities. It is not uncommon in the smaller schools for board members to take a personal interest in viewing an ongoing school project. However, while such interest is often highly supportive, it is also potentially destructive, for board members can interfere in the operational procedures of a school.

Characteristic Financial Considerations

Generally, small schools, whether rural or urban, appear to be

much more strapped for funds than most larger school districts. A number of the small private schools, especially the parochial schools, are currently experiencing a cost-price squeeze, and many are simply going out of business. The small rural school is also seriously affected by financial considerations. The major financial considerations affecting the small rural school are: facility quality; teacher recruitment and retention; per student costs; and local, State, and Federal educational allocations. Indeed, the fundamental weaknesses of the small school are directly attributable to financial considerations.

Since three levels of government participate in providing revenues for educational purposes, coordination of Federal, State, and local revenues is essential for effective educational finance. Since, in many states the major portion of local revenues is still derived from the local property tax and since a poorly administered system limits the availability of State and Federal funds, property tax reform is a matter of great concern and some urgency, particularly in the more impoverished rural areas (Alan, 1974). The importance of district size becomes apparent when White and Tweeten (1972) assert that the operative size of a school district should be defined as that which has minimum long range average costs, for, they maintain, districts should be organized to combine resources in the least costly manner and to operate on a long range average cost curve. Although economics does constitute a major factor in school district operations,

the Whit/Tweeten proposal is based on economic considerations alone, neglecting program considerations entirely.

Since the small school cost per student far exceeds that of the larger urban or consolidated schools, small school critics often point to the decreasing number of small school students as justification for consolidation. The Oregon State Board of Education (1969) reported that the per student cost in small schools may often be twice that of larger schools, an assertion substantiated by Clements (1970) and Mack and Lederman (1969). Unfortunately, however, the cost per student cannot be reduced unless there is an increase in district student numbers, and this is often an impossibility in isolated locations. Nevertheless, when comparing cost difference between larger and smaller districts, it is important to weigh the matter in terms of end results, for comparable education may very well both require and justify higher per student costs in the small school.

Lack of adequate facilities is another weakness often attributed to the small school (Stutz, 1965; Edington and Musselman, 1969). It should be remembered, however, that small school facilities are often inferior because they must serve many different functions and that while adequate facilities are important, teacher recruitment and retention constitute a far greater problem for the small rural school. Usually the small rural district does not and cannot pay salaries comparable to those of larger districts; consequently, the better teachers gravitate to the more urban areas where both remuneration

and facilities are better, and this, of course, leaves the less qualified teachers in the rural areas (Stutz, 1965; Estes, 1967; Burchinal, 1963; Edington and Musselman, 1969; Texas Education Agency, 1971).

The financial considerations of the small school are extremely important and should be given due recognition. Until large governmental agencies, both State and Federal, recognize their responsibility for providing a greater share of the small school financial burden, the financial problems of the small rural school will not abate. On the other hand, the people at the local level are going to have to realize that in order to gain outside financial aid, they will have to relinquish a certain amount of local control.

Characteristics of Professional Staff

As previously indicated, a major weakness of the rural school has been an inability to obtain and keep quality personnel. While this situation has been somewhat alleviated in the past few years due to an adequate supply of teachers, the cream of the crop still gravitates to urban and suburban schools. Moreover, administrators and small school counselors also seek the more advantageous positions found in urban areas. All too often principals and superintendents see the small school as nothing more than a stepping stone to a larger district. This kind of temporary commitment on the part of both staff and administration contributes to a less than stable atmosphere and breeds many of the problems found in the small rural school.

While studies by the Oregon State Board of Education (1969) and the Texas Education Agency (1971) substantiate a high turnover rate among rural teachers in the small schools, these studies also indicate that small school teachers have fewer degrees and less graduate training than teachers in larger schools. Among the major problems encountered by teachers in many small schools are heavy preparation loads and excessive outside duties which prevent them from staying abreast of educational developments and/or pursuing advanced degrees. (Oregon State Board of Education, 1969). It is quite common, for example, for rural secondary teachers to teach as many as five or six different daily preparations. It is a rare occasion, indeed, when a small school teacher can use the same lesson plan with more than one class. As Edington and Musselman (1969) have pointed out, it is, moreover, quite common for the teacher in rural America to teach outside his area of training. In fact, he may teach three or four different areas when trained for only one or two. On the other hand, a larger secondary school with eight or ten teachers may find it possible to provide adequately trained personnel for all its courses.

One way to overcome small school personnel deficiencies is to provide in-service programs. Reports from both Arizona (Weeks, 1972) and Minnesota (Askov, 1974) describe in-service programs in which small district teachers receive professional help from consultants for purposes of upgrading their areas of weakness. In many cases, these same consultants have simultaneously provided instruction for children

and teachers in the rural community, thereby serving a dual function. However, the key solution to personnel deficiencies in the small rural school probably centers on providing adequate pre-service training. Exemplary rural pre-service programs can be found in Georgia (Hubright, 1974) and Utah (Muse, 1974). In both programs, the teachers were given the opportunity to work within rural areas where they could acquire the background and on-the-spot training and experience necessary for competency. The Utah program also developed a list of special competencies needed by teachers in small rural schools, and these skills were built into the pre-service program.

It is apparent, then, that in any discussion of small rural schools, attention should be given to personnel deficiencies. The commitment, retention, and improvement of small school personnel are areas which demand careful consideration.

Socio-cultural Characteristics

The socio-cultural patterns of the small rural community exert a great influence upon the educational strengths and weaknesses of the small rural school. The socio-cultural characteristics which are, perhaps, most influential include: family characteristics, homogeneity; lack of upward mobility; and the teacher/community relationship.

There are identifiable educational problems related to the family characteristics found in the small rural community. For example, Estes (1967) and Lamanna and Samora (1965) indicated that urban residents are generally better educated than rural residents. Estes

concluded that the low educational level of rural parents is perpetuated in the educational level of the rural student. Moreover, lack of parental interest in classwork and lack of available reading materials in the home also contribute to a less than favorable educational atmosphere in the small rural community (Estes and Horner, et al., 1967).

Another socio-cultural characteristic of the small rural school is that of homogeneity, for many rural students come from a very homogeneous background. In the summary report of a conference conducted by the National Federation for the Improvement of Rural Education (NFIRE), Edington and Musselman (1969) concluded that students in rural communities enjoy a more homogeneous background than their urban counterparts. While homogeneity may limit sources of conflict in a small school, it may also limit student perspective, and since it is generally believed that students with a more diverse background more readily acquire a broader perspective, homogeneity may very well constitute a socio-cultural weakness attributable to the small rural school. In reference to rural homogeneity, it should be noted that a number of writers assert that rurality is in and of itself a disadvantage. Ackerson (1967) stated that the incentive to remain in high school or college is evidently not as great in small rural schools as it is in larger urban schools. However, it should be recognized that the educational and vocational opportunities afforded rural youth are far more limited than those afforded urban youth.

The lack of upward mobility in the small rural community is probably partially attributable to rural homogeneity and rural family characteristics, all of which influence the educational quality of the small rural school. In reference to the lack of upward mobility, Fulton (1974) suggested that since marriage provides the means by which rural women can achieve upward mobility and since advantageous marriages are generally dependent upon access to social contacts, the rural girls who experience greater upward mobility are those who meet their mates in urban areas. Those females who remain in thr rural community do not experience comparable mobility because they marry within the community and thereby maintain the status quo. On the other hand, Estes (1967) pointed out that the widespread poverty in rural areas has hampered education and has, consequently, had a negative effect on the mobility motivation of rural people. Swanson (1970) also concluded that there is a social atmosphere in the small rural community that prevents most people from moving or expanding beyond their immediate social groups. It is apparent, then, that those people who wish to aspire to upward mobility leave the community entirely.

Probably the most noted socio-cultural attribute of the small school system is that of the personal identity enjoyed by professionals who work in the small rural community (Catskill Area Project in Small Schools, 1959); Edington and Musselman, 1969). The educator in the small rural community is often a person who is highly respected by

the community, and, therefore, has more opportunity than his urban counterpart to assume leadership and power within the community. The status afforded the rural small school teacher is also an extremely important source of personal satisfaction. Since small rural communities generally do not have the extremes of wealth often found in urban communities, social stratification is usually not a problem encountered by the small school teacher. Another source of teacher satisfaction is the degree of community participation enjoyed by the school, a phenomenon not often found in the larger communities (Clements, 1970). Indeed, the small size of many rural communities often necessitates close social interaction, and the school building and school activities become the focal point for community meetings and social activities.

Classroom Management Characteristics

It is interesting to note that some of the more recent innovative programs in classroom management are utilizing practices which have, of necessity, been operative in the small rural school for years. Since in the small schools of the past it was often necessary for children to work at their own pace on those projects which they could do best, the open classroom and individualized study have long been commonplace in rural small schools. Today the small school offers a unique opportunity for study and research in the area of classroom management, for the small rural school affords the researcher opportunity to study small classes at individual grade levels or integrated

classes which include numerous grade levels. The small rural school also affords ample opportunity for the study of self-development in terms of discipline and responsibility.

It is important, however, to recognize the fact that many of the strengths attributed to small school classroom management are based upon opinion rather than research. It should be noted, moreover, that the opportunity for close student/teacher relationships and individualized attention are also viable potentials for larger schools. Randhawa and Michayluk (1974) have studied the learning environment of both rural and urban classrooms. They compared 47 classrooms in rural areas with 50 classrooms in urban areas, administering the learning environment inventory to half the students and the primary mental abilities test to the other half. Results indicated that, in general, rural and urban classrooms have measurably different learning climates and that there are significantly more cohesive structures prevalent in rural classrooms. However, rural classrooms were characterized by cliques, disorganization, competitiveness, and limited student satisfaction, while urban classrooms were characterized by superior material resources and a challenging and satisfying learning environment. Unfortunately, Randhawa and Michayluk did not conclude whether the rural differences were due to the fact that the students were from rural areas or due to the fact that they were from small schools.

To date, the strengths attributed to small school classroom management have not been substantiated by research. While experience and

careful observation have indicated that the rural setting provides better opportunity for a tightly knit organization and positive social interaction, it is very difficult to determine if rural/urban differences are due to student characteristics or to school size.

IV. PROMISING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES FOR THE SMALL RURAL SCHOOL

There have been numerous problems associated with identification of valuable small school practices. The major problem has been lack of evaluation. It becomes extremely difficult to ascertain the value of a given program or program change without benefit of proper evaluation, and it is even more difficult to transfer the unevaluated program from one school to another.

One problem of the past has been that those attempting to improve education in the small school have tried to take innovations which were successful in larger schools and adapt them to smaller schools. In a number of cases this practice has utterly failed. It is important, therefore, that those who would improve the small school start with the situation at hand. Educators must recognize the fact that each educational situation is different and unique and that successful educational programs are those that are developed and tested for the particular situation at hand.

Another problem in the improvement of the small rural school has been the lack of objective evaluation of new and/or innovative practices. While individual school districts have been highly successful in various programs designed to meet the needs of students in the small school, in most cases such programs have not been adequately evaluated and developed so that they might be transferred to other districts. Moreover, when a program is evaluated, the evaluation reports are

often based upon the subjective opinions of those involved rather than upon hard data. Lack of objective evaluation has made it extremely difficult to transport educational practices from one school to another with any degree of success. However, under the leadership of the Northwest Laboratory (1970 and 1971), this practice is beginning to change. The Laboratory has initiated programs which are tested for use in similar small school situations. Additionally, the Educational Resources Information Center/Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) has published a document titled Educational Innovations in Rural America (Wilson, 1970) which lists promising practices that have had some basis of adequate evaluation. It is extremely important that further work be done in the area of evaluation so that promising educational practices may be identified and applied elsewhere.

In a presentation at the 79th annual meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, Sturges (1974) reported that small schools are reluctant to abandon many of their advantages and that while they are adapting to change, they are continuing to capitalize on the major small school strength--that of the human element in learning. Given this kind of dedication to the human aspect of learning, it is hoped that research institutions and universities will emphasize study and evaluation of small school strengths. There is increasing evidence that the small school can operate effectively. In the May 1972 issue of Phi Delta Kappan, Jack Schoenholtz reported that

a school of approximately 125 students has overcome a course deficiency and is now offering more than three times the number of courses previously offered. Such success stories are encouraging, as they are indicative of the strengths and potential of the small school operation.

Improved Structure

In the past, a great many politicians and educators working at the state level have believed that the only way to improve education in the small rural school was to consolidate the smaller schools into a single larger school. However, consolidation has proved less than satisfactory, for even though the larger institutions provide more advantages and offer greater curriculum variety, the unique advantages of the small school are invariably lost in the consolidation process. In recent years, consequently, there have been attempts to develop a structure which would maintain the identity of the small school and yet offer the advantages of a more varied curriculum, thereby increasing the educational opportunities afforded rural youth. The most promising of the new structures has been development of a program which allows a number of small districts to share services by virtue of an intermediate district or unit, thus enabling a district to maintain its identity and still provide the advantages inherent in a larger consolidated organization. Such a program is accomplished by: 1) a cooperative agreement between the schools; 2) shared school resources; or 3) imposition of a larger administrative unit upon the small school for purposes of coordinating the activities of each school. It has been found that

each one of these intermediate structures has successfully improved the educational programs in small schools throughout the country.

Mrdjenovich (1974) advocates a program in which the small districts take the initiative as "brokers" of cooperative education, rather than one in which the small districts wait for someone else to play the role of educational broker. Such initiative, he maintains, should prove successful, because the decisions would be made by the people involved rather than by some intermediate structure which has been forced upon them. Such a structure could be either regulatory or service oriented. However, to date, the more successful examples have been service oriented.

In most instances the successful changes in structure have been accomplished on a regional, rather than a county basis, especially in the isolated areas which cover many counties. However, in some of the more densely populated areas, such as California, the county system has proved quite effective as an intermediate unit which can provide services to small schools.

In the publication Intermediate Education Units and Their Promise for Rural Education (published by ERIC/CRESS), Benson and Barber (1974) detail the historical development of intermediate educational units. Listing many of the characteristics of this structural change, they describe educational improvements which have been effective in small isolated schools. This publication is available through the National Education Laboratory Publishers, Inc., in Austin, Texas and should

prove most valuable to educators examining structural changes for small rural schools.

The concept of shared services in an intermediate unit can be as flexible as the school wishes it to be. Shared services may involve trading students from one school to another for purposes of providing more varied curriculum, or shared services may involve sharing teachers with particular or unique skills. Equipment may also be shared, particularly such items as mobile trailers or other moveable equipment. Even in-service programs can be shared. Shared in-service programs provide teachers, administrators, and counselors with the opportunity to learn in groups.

The intermediate unit structure has great potential for improving the educational quality of the small school if the community is desirous of doing so. At this time, approximately half of the states in the U.S. have investigated the intermediate unit as a means of changing administrative structure and have used it effectively in developing more adequate educational programs for rural students. Undoubtedly, other states can profit from this alternative as well.

Use of Media and Technology

One of the most promising ways to improve education in the small school, especially the small rural school, is through proper use of the communications technology we now have at our disposal. While there have been some isolated attempts in the past to make limited use of technology, in the last three or four years there has been a dramatic

increase in the use of technology in rural schools. J. R. Perrine's extensive study, Telecommunications Technology and Rural Education in the United States (1975), is indicative of recent interest in the use of technology in rural areas and should prove extremely valuable to those interested in improving communications systems in rural schools. Further indication of the need for and interest in rural communications systems may be found in a paper by Peter C. Goldmark, The New Rural Society, which was presented at the National Cable Television Association Annual Convention in 1972. Goldmark asserts that since the urban areas will not be able to support future population increases, there will soon be 100 million Americans living in rural areas. In view of this phenomenon, Goldmark advocates use of television as a means of providing isolated areas with employment opportunities; education and health services; and social, cultural, and recreational pursuits. Goldmark also advocates including television as part of the regular educational program in rural areas. Increased efforts to utilize mass media and telecommunications in rural areas are evident not only in the United States but throughout the world as well. For example, major advancements are not being made in the use of satellites to beam educational television programs to isolated students all over the world. Some satellite programs even provide for two-way communication. In view of current technological advancements, then, it is only reasonable that small rural schools pursue the immense potential inherent in telecommunications systems.

Distinguishing between the different ways in which telecommunications can accomodate isolated groups, Perrine (1975) illustrates a variety of educational applications. For example, he addresses the use of both television and telecommunications for specific groups such as the Native Americans, describing some of the programs which have been successfully employed by these people. One of the most successful Native American programs, he reports, is that of the Ramah Radio Project conducted and developed by the Navajo people at Ramah, New Mexico. In this program, Native Americans operate and program their own radio shows which are broadcast to the Ramah school and the Navajo tribe in both Navajo and English. Perrine also mentions the Isleta Computer Systems Project in New Mexico where the Isleta Elementary School is using teletype terminals connected by telephone line to Stanford University; however, Perrine indicates that there is some difficulty in properly evaluating this project due to contamination from other types of programs. On the Jicarilla-Apache Reservation in Dulce, New Mexico, the school owns and operates a TV system which presents approximately ten percent of all the school material. Additionally, the Navajo tribe has an educational communications program under consideration, and the newly organized All Indian Pueblo Council Inc., of Pueblo Indians in northern New Mexico is currently attempting to adapt mass media communications to their needs.

Perrine also addresses the problems of migrant students, noting that since they attend a number of different schools in one year, their

problems present a particular challenge to the use of telecommunications systems. The most widely used migrant telecommunications system is that of the Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS) which, via a computer based in Little Rock, Arkansas, transfers a migrant student's academic, health, and other records from one school to another upon request. The MSRTS has been in operation for a number of years and has been quite effective in facilitating the educational needs of migrant students. Other attempts to link the migrant student with his educational institution include: 1) the Mesilla Valley FM Radio Project in Dona Ana County, New Mexico; 2) the FM Radio Project in Palm Beach County, Florida; 3) the Video Project for Migrant Education in six public school districts in New Jersey; and 4) the TESOL-Visual Literary Project which is under the auspices of the Teacher Corps of Rural Migrant Groups, initiated in 1970 at the University of Southern California. Another program which affects the Mexican American migrant population is the Carrasolendas Bilingual Education through Television Project which was funded by the Bilingual Education Act and initiated in July, 1970 by the Educational Service Center, Region XIII, in Austin, Texas. Perrine asserts that since these programs continue to operate independently, there is a need for coordination of the various migrant telecommunications efforts.

Recognizing the potential of satellites for educational broadcasting to remote rural areas, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has initiated two satellite experiments called

Applications Technology Satellites (ATS 1 and ATS 6). Perrine (1975) examines these experiments in detail. ATS 1 has been utilized in rural educational experiments in Alaska, while ATS 6, which was launched in May of 1974, has been used in rural educational experiments in Alaska, the Rocky Mountain States, and Appalachia. Although NASA provided for the development, construction, and launching of these satellites, the U.S. Office of Education and the National Institute of Education provided the necessary ground hardware and educational development. The experiment in Alaska, ATS 1, indicated that there were three factors critical to the successful use of satellite broadcasting for educational purposes; these were: 1) extensive planning; 2) involvement of community members and teachers in the initial planning stages; and 3) a need for a sufficient quantity of high quality programs (Perrine, 1975). While the evaluation reports on ATS 6 are not yet available, as that satellite is now serving programs in India, it is hoped that it may be used for projects in rural America in the near future. In his discussion of the ATS 1 and ATS 6 programs in Telecommunications Technology and Rural Education in the United States, Perrine concludes that the future of large scale satellite-based educational telecommunications is most uncertain.

> Beyond CTS, however, are only commercial satellites which, in the main, are low powered and demand expensive ground equipment which may preclude any meaningful rural satellite-based education projects due to prohibitive costs....Among the options to be considered is using ATS-6 after its deployment for a year in India. However, should all efforts fail to stimulate continued interest in large-scale,

> satellite-based rural education projects, then only medium or small-scale projects may be within the reach of rural populations in the near future. (Perrine, 1975, p. 220)

In an effort to promote the use of telecommunications systems in rural areas in the U.S., Perrine has developed plans for four types of telecommunications systems which include: 1) the rural Native American population; 2) the migrant student population; 3) a region in the U.S. corresponding to the rural student population of the Rocky Mountain region; and 4) the entire rural school population of the United States. Perrine maintains that the cost per student is as low as $6 per year for the nationwide system and about $30 to $35 per year for the other systems. Given the vast millions that are poured into education each year, the per student costs for telecommunications are extremely low. However, satellite systems are very difficult to initiate and operate without Federal funding or some other outside stimulus and securing cooperation among the 14,000 rural school districts to fund a portion of such a program is virtually impossible.

Due, undoubtedly, to its tremendous need to serve the isolated child, Alaska has taken the leadership in the development of programs using technology and media in the small school. Holzmueller (1974) has examined the use of technology in that state. He describes automated teaching systems in Alaskan schools which have motivated low achievers, offered multisensory stimulation, and repetitive drill. This same system, Holzmueller maintains, has freed teachers to help students in their particular areas of weakness. Additionally, Alaskan

educational radio has provided opportunity for both students and villagers to work directly with language arts instructors and media people to improve language skills via radio program.

Some experiments using technology to bring educational programs within the reach of isolated children have been less than successful than others. In an evaluation of home oriented pre-school education, Evaluation of the Prototype Home-Visitor Training Package, Joe E. Shively (1974) reports a lack of significant results on the attitude inventory for a group of Minnesota teachers who had used the Home-Visitor training package. Likewise, in an evaluation of a "books-by-mail" program, Lucille Wert, et al., (1974) also report negative results, maintaining that program failure is due primarily to the fact that patrons are not willing to pay the additional costs of a "books-by-mail" program.

Experimentation in the use of media and technology for the education of rural children is becoming prevalent throughout the world, especially in many of the underdeveloped countries. A sampling of the evaluation reports on such projects reveals general success (Hornik, et al., 1974; Searls, 1974; Cusack, 1974). For example, in a comparative study of a Mexican television-based educational program and its more traditional counterpart (John Mayo and Steven Klees, 1974), it was found that student achievement in math, Spanish, and chemistry was greater in the television based system than in the more traditional system. Mayo and Klees conclude that since the cost of the television system is at least

25 percent less than that of the traditional educational system, the television system more effectively meets Mexico's educational needs, and they recommend, therefore, that Mexico's educational policy makers seriously consider implementation of a national educational television system.

Since it is clear that the use of technology can readily facilitate the education of the rurally isolated child, it is hoped that research funds will be made available for future development of educational telecommunications systems and that educators will acknowledge the value of this most promising educational practice.

In-service Programs for School Personnel

The key to the success of any educational program is quality educators, for without quality teachers, quality educational programs become an impossibility. The retention of quality teachers has always been a problem for small rural schools, as many of the better teachers are reluctant to move to the more isolated areas and those who will, tend to move on to the larger schools as soon as they have gained experience and found a proper opening. Maintaining quality instruction in rural areas is also a problem, for it is often much more difficult for the small school teacher to obtain in-service training than it is for his urban counterpart. Since the smaller schools are generally located some distance from colleges and universities, it is also difficult for the isolated teacher to take advantage of courses and advanced degrees. In general, teacher deficiencies may be linked to

two factors which are beyond the control of the small school administrator; these are: 1) program deficiencies in the teacher training institutions; and 2) shortcomings in the local socio-economic environment which preclude recruitment and retention of quality teachers. While the first problem may be solved by bringing pressure to bear upon the teacher training institutions, the second may require considerable effort, including the procurement of funds necessary for competitive recruitment and retention.

Immediate educational returns, however, can be gained from in-service programs for existing teachers and administrators in the small rural school. Very often the initial step in upgrading the staff of an isolated school involves convincing personnel that there is a need for in-service training. Once this need has been acknowledged, effective in-service training can, if properly managed, be accomplished with minimal resources. In the development of in-service programs, the best results have been derived from thinking in terms of the larger geographical area and beyond the individual school district. In large geographical areas, an intermediate unit or the state department of education can most efficiently administrate in-service programs. It has been found that the most successful rural in-service educational programs have been those that: 1) serve large numbers of remotely based teachers; and 2) bring programs to the teacher at his home site (Burdin, 1973). However, the leadership for initiating such programs must come from units larger than the individual small districts. If

intermediate units are not available in a given state, then the state department of education must assume the leadership in developing in-service programs. State departments of education can and should work in cooperation with colleges and universities and/or other agencies within the area.

When possible, it is extremely important to provide in-service education at the teacher's home site or near the teacher's home site. This may be accomplished by sending in-service training personnel to a number of different school districts or by sending mobile units with various types of curriculum to the teacher's school (Hall, et al., 1969). The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (Codwell, 1969) has developed an exemplary in-service program for improving the instructional performance of teachers in small rural schools. The purpose of this program was to determine the effects of micro-teaching on the instructional behavior of rural school teachers. Results of the program indicate that teachers who have had to observe and analyze their teaching behavior as revealed via videotape, demonstrate significant improvement in instructional skill, teacher attitude, and teacher/pupil interaction.

Since tenure laws and local politics often make it extremely difficult to remove inferior small school teachers, retraining seems to be the most reasonable solution to the problem of deficient personnel. It should be remembered, moreover, that many "inferior" teachers are not lacking in ability but are simply deficient due to a lack of

proper training and/or lack of opportunity to stay abreast of their disciplines, especially those teachers located in isolated areas. Retraining via adequate in-service programs can help to eliminate these personnel deficiencies and can, thereby, enhance the education of children living in isolated rural areas.

Curriculum Development

A major weakness of the small rural school is that of limited curriculum. In recognition of this weakness, accrediting agencies have minimized course number as an accreditation criterion, especially at the secondary level. Nonetheless, many small rural high schools fail to meet accreditation requirements simply because they still cannot offer an adequate number of courses. If the small school is to begin to meet even the basic needs of its students, the problem of curriculum must be recognized and appropriate steps must be taken to correct curriculum deficiencies. In view of the fact that larger and medium-sized schools are continually expanding their curricula while the small school is getting farther and farther behind in its curriculum development, academic, general, and vocational curriculum development should constitute a major priority in the effort to strengthen the small rural school.

There are currently a number of viable means by which the small school can expand its curriculum. Generally speaking, an expanded curriculum can be accomplished by providing: 1) more breadth via additional curricular offerings; or 2) more depth via individualized

instruction. Of course, individualized and small group instruction are readily adapted to the small school environment, since this kind of instruction accomodates both the fast and slow learner, allowing each to proceed at his own pace, and it affords the teacher opportunity to work with others. There are now numerous educational programs and packages on the market, particularly in the areas of career and vocational education, which should prove valuable to the expansion of small school curricula, especially since many of these packages have been developed specifically for the small rural school.

For some years now, those involved in vocational education have recognized the need for specialized curricula for the small isolated school. Consequently, a number of communities have developed mobile vocational education facilities which can travel from one school to another, providing opportunity for the kind of hands-on experience otherwise unavailable in the small rural school. Within given geographical areas, some intermediate units have helped to provide the opportunity for such programs. In other instances, state departments of education have assumed leadership in providing mobile vocational education programs. Although it is probably impossible to provide the rural student with specific training in many vocational areas, it is possible to provide exploratory programs and basic core curriculum in certain areas of occupational education. The rationale underlying exploratory programs is one which assumes that after a student leaves secondary school, he can and will go to an urban area

or an occupational center for more specialized training and necessary job qualification. Having developed curricular materials specifically for the small high school, Utah is among the leaders in the development of occupational programs (Wasden, 1970). Also, in conjunction with the University of Nebraska, ERIC/CRESS (1972) has published a set of guidelines, Cooperative Vocational Education in Small Schools: A Suggested Guide for Program Planning, which emphasizes the inherent potential of curriculum cooperation. The key, then, to providing better vocational education in the small rural school includes cooperation among a number of different schools, the state departments of education, and occupational service centers, as well as, provision for a broad occupational base upon which the student may found further training in a more specialized environment (Thomas, Paul, and Smith, 1971).

A weakness often attributed to the small school student is lack of knowledge of available career opportunities. Accordingly, some of the more far-sighted career educators have recognized the need for career education in rural areas and have designed career education programs specifically targeted for small isolated schools. Meeker, Colorado has assumed leadership in development of an integrated career education program (Meeker Schools Integrated Career Development Curriculum, 1973). In a report on the Western States Small Schools Project, Russell Herrell and Herbert Steffens (1972) describe a curriculum project for grades 9-12 that would also enhance career opportunities for rural youth. Owen Collins (1974) describes a career education program in

rural Kentucky which advocates the use of a regional career education center. Collins concludes that a regional approach to the delivery of career education programs is both workable and potentially effective, since such an approach would reach a large number of people and since school personnel should more readily respond to a systematically organized structure such as a career center.

While there is undoubtedly a need for further research and development in the area of specialized curriculum for the small school, it is likely that some material can be adapted from that already developed for the urban school, though care should be taken to avoid transporting identical curriculum from a larger school to a smaller school.

Community Involvement

If the small rural school is to achieve lasting change, it is extremely important that the community be involved in any decision making process affecting change. If the community is not involved in this process, it may perceive proposed change as a threat and, consequently, impede potential educational improvements. In a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society in Montreal, Jongeward (1974) concluded that the once close relationship between the small rural school and its community has recently been seriously weakened and that that relationship must be renewed. Jongeward indicated that educational change requires: community understanding and support; parental cooperation; and a close

relationship between students, teachers, administrators, school boards, and parents. This type of community involvement, he asserted will not emerge spontaneously; rather, it must be provided for via input from the community, and that input must be utilized in the decision making process. Although the school board ostensibly is designed to represent the community, it is readily acknowledged that in a great many instances, it does not function in that manner at all. That is, school boards often are made up of people representing groups which have a particular ax to grind or a vested interest in the school program. Consequently, a number of groups may not find representation on the school board, particularly those groups which constitute a minority.

One means of furthering community involvement is utilization of publications designed specifically for that purpose. ERIC/CRESS has recently published a booklet entitled How Well do They Represent You? A Handbook on Local Rural School Boards for Parents and Other Citizens which describes the means by which citizens can improve the community/ school board relationship and can better participate in the educational decision making process. This publication is available through ERIC/ CRESS which is located at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Other CRESS publications on this topic include: 1) Small Schools Can Have Adequate Curriculums (Loustaunau, 1975) and 2) Rural Education: Partners for Accountability (White, 1975).

The communtiy education concept is another means by which community involvement may be achieved. A community education program involves

members of the community in education and educational processes, which helps to motivate community educational input and enhances the educational level and interest of people of all ages. A community education program can also serve as a valuable vehicle for channeling communications from the community to the educators.

The parents of minority children constitute a very important group within the community which more than often has been seriously neglected in terms of community involvement. The extent of this neglect becomes apparent when one considers the fact that in their homes minority parents generally do not speak the language of the majority, much less that of educators. In a report on a training program for Native American teachers in Quebec, Chislaine Girard (1972) maintained that even when Eskimo is used as the language of instruction, the instructional program itself is perceived to be representative of an alien culture, since the adults in the community do not feel the school to be an integral part of their community. That is, merely changing the language of an educational program to that of the community does not assure a successful program. Obviously other means of community involvement must be employed simultaneously to promote that feeling of belonging which contributes to the success of any educational program.

In the attempt to promote community involvement in the educational process of the rural small school, the potential of agencies outside the realm of the school should not be overlooked. The agricultural

extension service and other comparable agencies can and do provide educational services; therefore, an effort should be made to coordinate agency and school educational services. The U.S. Office of Education's Report of the Task Force on Rural Education (1969), for example, indicates that much more attention should be given to adult education programs, since these programs can enhance the effectiveness of the regular school program and can also provide valuable communication channels for the community.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

As it is impossible for the small school, whether rural or urban, to practice effective change in a vacuum, this section attempts to describe the implications of small school changes.

Total Community Development

In a publication entitled Developing Educational Alternatives: Some New Ways for Education in Rural Areas, A. W. Wood (1974) concluded that there is probably very little change that can be achieved by education itself, whether conventional or otherwise. He maintained that adequate educational change must, therefore, be coupled with total community development. Too often the schools have acted as if they were an entity unto themselves, especially the smaller rural schools. When one considers the fact that populations are beginning to disperse into many of the rural areas; that people are beginning to believe the rural community is a good place to raise children and that industry is moving into the rural areas and affecting not only the immediate area but neighboring areas as well; it is perfectly clear that any change must accomodate the total community. Therefore, future efforts to strengthen the small school should include the concept of total community development.

Local, State, and National Program Priorities

If education in the small rural school is to be strengthened, it must become a priority at the local, State, and Federal levels. In

his publication, Inequality, A Portrait of Rural America, Lewis R. Tamblyn (1973) documented the fact that Federal spending on human resource development disproportionately favors metropolitan counties over nonmetropolitan areas and that rural people do not, therefore, share proportionately in the distribution of Federal programs. If lasting change is to take place, this trend must be reversed at all levels of government so that small rural schools are given their fair share of government monies. At the State level, recognition should be given to the fact that in rural areas there is a sparsity factor which deserves consideration. That is, state governments should acknowledge the fact that fewer students will inevitably cost more per student to educate and state governments should, therefore, be prepared to contribute to this cost.

The New Mexico funding formula is exemplary of governmental recognition of the sparsity factor, for this formula accounts for schools which are isolated and generally quite small. If isolated schools and communities are not recognized via both educational and total development grograms, the nation will suffer along with the individual schools and communities involved, but if these priorities are established and carried out, America can look once again to its rural communities for leadership and perserverence.

Structural Changes

Too often educational structure or structural changes have been considered as ends in and of themselves, rather than as the means to

more desirable goals. If our major goal is an adequate educational program for small rural schools, then structural changes should be considered as the means by which those changes may be achieved. For example, at the local level consolidation has been a red flag; consequently, consolidation, rather than an improved educational program, has been the issue. In many cases, consolidation may provide the better educational program, while in other cases it may not, but it is important to remember that improved education is the issue, not structural change. A local community should, therefore, examine its particular situation in depth to determine which structure would most adequately provide the desired educational program. Primary consideration should be given to the youth served by the program, rather than the select individuals within the community who stand to profit from a structural change or lack of change.

As previously mentioned, approximately half the states in the nation have adopted the shared services concept. Many of the other states, however, are dragging their feet in this area. Reluctance to cooperate with neighboring districts is often due to a fear that an additional organization operating in between the school and the state would limit both desirable resources and local input into the state legislature and state department of education. Such fears are, perhaps, indicative of administrative concern for power rather than concern for effective educational programs. Fred White and Luther Tweaton (1972) have suggested that in order to provide rural areas with the specialized

services which they need, cooperation with other districts may become a necessity, since costs are increasing so rapidly. If cooperation cannot sufficiently reduce costs, then school district reorganization may be necessary.

State governments are also neglecting the small rural school. Leadership from the states is needed to promote the intermediate unit and/or shared services concept. In a paper presented at the Association of Southern Agriculture Workers, James Longest (1973) suggested that there is a need for a center at the state level to support inter-disciplinary programs in community development for rural areas. In such a center, an educational division could work very closely with state departments of education, state extension services, and other agencies in furthering the role of education in rural development. Such a center could exercise the power and/or responsibility of cutting across a great many state agencies, such as labor, agriculture, education, and commerce, and could, therefore, establish community programs which would strengthen the small school.

National programs and policies have also been seriously negelected. In 1969, for example, the U. S. Office of Education established a Task Force to look into the problems of the rural school, but since that time there has been no indication that the report of the Task Force has even been read, much less acted upon. Just as there are agencies in the U. S. Office of Education established to protect various minority groups, there also should be agencies established in that office to

protect the interests of the small rural school. Unfortunately, the problems of small rural schools generally go virtually unnoticed in the hierarchy of the U. S. Office of Education and, to some extent, in the National Institute of Education. It might be advisable, therefore, to establish such an organization at the under-secretary level so that programs could be coordinated from the National Institute of Education as well as from the U. S. Office of Education. Additionally, research funds should be made available specifically for strengthening the educational programs in small rural schools. Such funds should probably be directed toward development, rather than research, so that programs already developed and tested may be readily adapted to meet the immediate needs of the rural student.

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National workshop on the establishment of local Educational Information Centers, New Mexico State University, 1969
California State College at Long Beach. Program on Recruitment of Mexican Americans into Higher Education, 1969
Arizona State Department of Education - Development of an exemplary Vocational Education Program for a Rural County, 1970
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