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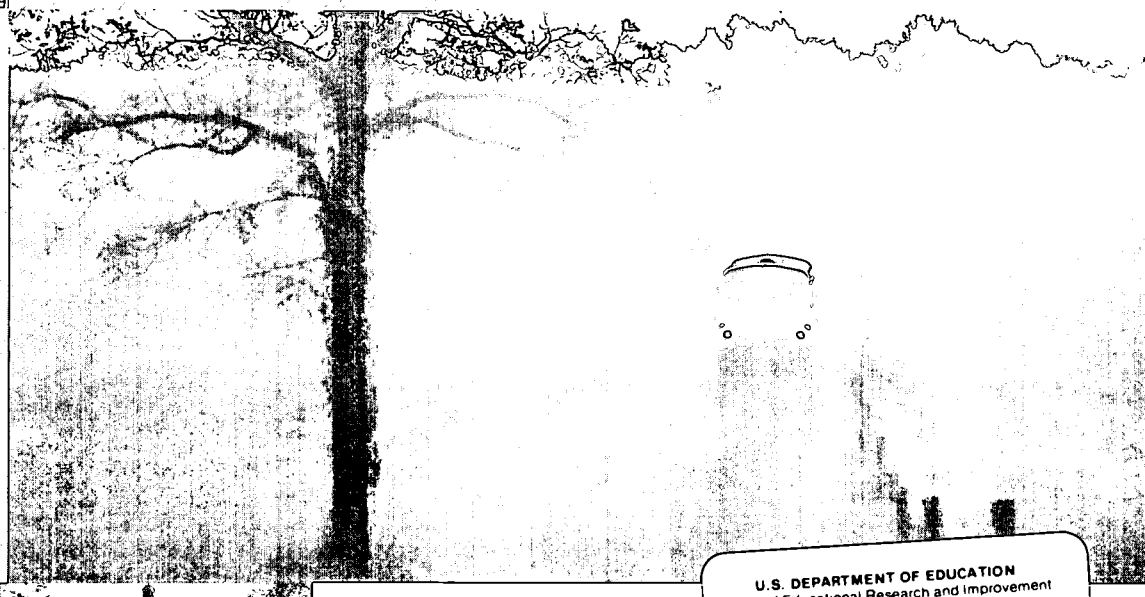
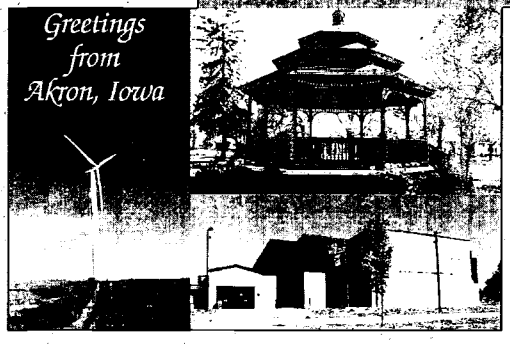
ABSTRACT

This report focuses on gifted and talented education in six rural schools. An introduction summarizes a 1999 national assessment of rural gifted education and points out that the standards movement may hinder development of both effective rural schools and gifted programming. Of the six schools profiled, two were founded especially for gifted and talented students, all are small, and each has a niche developed by a special teacher or in response to specific circumstances. Akron-Westfield Community School in northwestern Iowa serves 700 K-12 students; features include social support and mentoring for gifted students, a schoolwide History Day, and yearlong history projects by high school students. Jackson River Governor's School (Clifton Forge, Virginia) offers community college courses to gifted high school juniors and seniors from surrounding rural school districts. At Voznesenka School on the Kenai Peninsula (Alaska), a teacher reflects on the situation of gifted students in a traditional village of Russian Old Believers. Nevada City School of the Arts is an arts-based charter elementary school in north-central California that provides flexible, individual attention to student needs--physical disabilities, exceptional abilities, behavioral problems, or some combination of these. The Native American Preparatory School (Rowe, New Mexico) is a residential high school for gifted and talented Native Americans that honors students' cultural heritage while providing a rigorous college preparation. Idalia High School in eastern Colorado was part of a school district "deconsolidation." Idalia's gifted students benefit from their English teacher's involvement in the Bread Loaf Rural Teachers Network. Sidebars present quotes from students and teachers, information on special programs, and Web addresses. Appendices present national data on rural schools by state, an Iowa timeline on education, and Iowa school data. (SV)

Gifted Voices from Rural America

"We're in an area where
the only way you can surv
through collaboration and fo
partnerships," says Dr. Da
Smith, superintendent of
County Schools, a school d
located in the heart of





The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

GIFTED VOICES FROM RURAL AMERICA

College of Education

The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development

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THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Contents:

Dedication:

To the nation's rural gifted and talented students and their teachers.

and

In honor of Henry B. and Jocelyn Wallace, Henry D. Wallace, and Linda Wallace-Gray.

Acknowledgments:

Within the Belin-Blank Center the following individuals were instrumental in the creation of this report: Damien Ihrig, Administrator for Talent Searches, Research, and Evaluation and Clar Baldus, Administrator for Rural School Programs and Inventiveness Programs. Through their work at the Center, the other Belin-Blank Center administrators also contributed to this report: Laurie Croft, Administrator for Professional Development; Jerilyn Fisher, Administrator for Conferences and Newsletter Editor; Brian Sponcil, Administrator for Computers and Technology; and Jan Warren, Administrator for Student Programs and Talent Searches.

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We are also grateful to Megan Knight for her proofreading assistance and to Shannon Heiman for her superb design of this publication as well as the 1999 publication, *Gifted Education in Rural Schools: A National Assessment.*

JAMES A. VAN ALLEN
(Biographical Sketch)

James A. Van Allen (b. 1914) continues to pursue professional research and writing at The University of Iowa, where he has been a member of the faculty since 1951. He has taught numerous formal courses in physics and astronomy there and guided the successful completion of 45 master's degrees and 34 Ph.D. degrees by his advanced students.

His research is in the area of space physics. In 1958, he discovered the radiation belts of the Earth and has served as principal scientific investigator for 24 space missions including satellites of the Earth and the first spacecraft to Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. He has received many honors for his pioneering work including the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society (U.K.) in 1978; the National Medal of Science (USA) 1987 and the Crafoord Prize of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in 1989.

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

In September 1918, I joined the kindergarten class of Saunders School, part of the public school system of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, then a town of about 2,700. I continued there through the sixth grade, then transferred to junior high school for grades seven through nine, and, in due course, moved on to high school for grades ten through twelve, graduating from the latter in 1931.

Almost all of my teachers were women. They were dedicated career professionals who were forbidden to marry on the then prevalent belief that they should not be distracted from their teaching duties by family responsibilities. This restriction was not applied to the three male teachers that I had – one in physics, one in solid geometry and one in manual training, later called woodworking shop.

I loved school and found every day to be a fresh challenge. Homework was obligatory. I was a good student but usually spent two or three hours every evening on problem solving, writing and study of the next day's assignments. Often my father would read to my three brothers and me for a half hour or more immediately after supper. Both at school and at home there was a strong emphasis on basics and rigorous thinking and there was a pervasive sense of morality, stability and self-criticism. Freely translated, self-criticism meant not quitting until you "got things straight" in your own mind.

As a young woman, my mother had taught in a one-teacher, one-room rural school, grades one through eight, near Eddyville. Also, my father and his father had established a strong family tradition of education in order "to amount to something" and an equally strong disdain for "non-essentials." It was assumed, without discussion, that my brothers and I would continue to college and professional schools.

My public school education in Mt. Pleasant and the guidance of my parents laid the foundation for everything that I have been able to do professionally since then.

Retrospectively, after a long career as a teacher myself, I continue to regard my early education with pride and gratitude. I hope that present day students are as fortunate as I was.

James A. Van Allen
12/27/00

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I. Rural Voices: Introduction

It is important to remember and appropriately hail the efforts of small schools that, by necessity, work closely with their communities. In many instances, the school is at the very heart of the community, just as schools commonly were a century ago. We must listen to the voices and wisdom of the people in these schools as we try to build better programs to serve some of the most able students, in America's rural places.

The educational opportunities of gifted and talented young people living in rural areas and small towns in the United States deserves to be of concern and interest to America's educators. These students are everywhere: Every state has rural areas and rural schools, 50% of all public schools are in small towns and rural areas; and 39% of all public school students, nearly 17,500,000, live in rural communities. Every state has gifted students, and this too is a national issue.

This report expresses the voices representing the convergence of these two national issues: rural and gifted. Whereas the issue of gifted education in rural schools is a new topic, ironically, the pioneers of gifted education were individuals from rural areas. The Wallace Family National Conference on Gifted Education in Rural Schools allows us to acknowledge the historical voices of gifted education. (For a historical timeline on gifted education and gifted education in rural schools, see *Gifted Education in Rural Schools: A National Assessment,* 1999.)

Lewis Terman, from rural Indiana, was the first voice to address the objective, standardized measure of giftedness. His voice helped break the stereotype that gifted were not normal. His work provided empirical information on assessment, cognitive capacities, and curriculum possibilities. His was the voice of the mind.

Leta Hollingworth, born in a sod-house in Nebraska, first articulated the social-emotional issues that accompanied outstanding intellectual capacity. Her research indicated that the greater the intellectual capacity, the more challenging the social-emotional adjustments. Hers was the voice of the heart.

Other voices, such as Julian C. Stanley, E. Paul Torrance (both from rural communities) and more recently, Howard Gardner, Joe Renzulli, and Robert Sternberg have articulated a more comprehensive voice to the issues within the field of gifted education and have provided varying philosophies and methods for educating gifted students.

This chorus of voices has given us the understanding that giftedness cuts across the boundaries of gender, ethnicity, economics, and geography. Freud offered the notion that "biology is destiny"; we are suggesting that, today, geography is educational destiny. Many of the current school improvement reforms, including options such as vouchers and charter schools, attempt to break the connection between geography and educational opportunity. But options such as vouchers and charter schools have immediate and greater impact on suburban and urban schools. In rural schools, the immediate impact for gifted students will depend on changes within the rural school. In recognizing this, our focus is not to urbanize, or suburbanize rural schools in the name of gifted education, but to advocate educational opportunities for gifted students while preserving the integrity of rural schools.

The Wallace Programs for Gifted Education in Rural Schools, including conferences and publications, are predicated on respect for the integrity of rural schools and the unique needs of gifted children and their teachers. This publication gives voice to their story.

Gifted education and rural education have a few things in common. Both have borne the brunt of various educational fads. Both have received scant funding and a dearth of national attention, as compared to the response to the needs of urban areas and more remedial or "at-risk" students.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a movement to standardize schools—a result of the industrialization of American society—forced rural schools to undergo dramatic changes that included the use of standard textbooks, less reliance on the intermingling of different-aged students and greater adherence to set grades, and less influence by local communities on the curriculum of their schools. Consolidation, a movement that made schools larger and sent students farther and farther away from their hometowns, was another outgrowth of this movement and one that is believed by many rural school experts to have played havoc with existing and often well-working educational systems. Today, small schools and districts continue to fight consolidation, though they sometimes must rely on it as the only way to stay afloat.

The standardization movement of the early part of the last century also poorly affected burgeoning gifted programs. The attempt to equalize educational opportunities for students in all parts of the country and at all levels of educational attainment did not encourage especially able students to achieve their potential. It was, perhaps, the beginning of mediocrity as a "standard" of American education. With many school administrators believing academically gifted students could make it on their own without special attention, funding and programming for these students was disbanded.

Only several decades later with the Soviet's launch of the satellite Sputnik was interest renewed in gifted programs. In an almost immediate reaction to perceived shortcomings in American math and science education, accelerated and ability-grouping programs came into vogue, along with increased research into giftedness and creativity.

The emerging trend of the early 21st century, the state standards movement, is seen as a hindrance by many educators of gifted students as well as rural educators. In rural areas, an already small pool of resources is being depleted in the preparation of students for standardized tests and the meeting of state-set criteria. In order to ready some of their more remedial students, teachers' time and skills have been siphoned away from electives and advanced or honors-level courses, those most often taken by gifted students, and redirected toward helping the academically lesser able of the school population. In a similar vein, educators who are responsible for gifted programs in larger

schools are watchful of the standards movement because the standards are often too generalized to address the needs of highly able students. Therefore, educators of the gifted see the standards movement as a detractor from the development of effective programming for gifted students.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FROM *GIFTED EDUCATION IN RURAL SCHOOLS: A NATIONAL ASSESSMENT* (1999)

The Belin-Blank Center is producing a series of reports examining how gifted students are served in rural schools. *Gifted Education in Rural Schools: A National Assessment*, our first report published in 1999, took a pulse. It provided an overview of both gifted and rural education and how the two have interacted and overlapped. In addition, a series of charts and statistics highlighted conditions affecting schools and youth in the twenty most rural states. As indicated in the 1999 report, the challenges faced today by rural schools attempting to serve their gifted and talented students are numerous. Teachers, administrators, parents, students, and governmental statistics report that the following are among the most common challenges:

- **A lack of community resources, such as museums, libraries, and professional mentors, with which to augment school resources and facilities.**
- **A lack of a sizable peer base for gifted students.**
- **A lack of time for student involvement in additional programming, such as community college courses.**
- **Difficulties in hiring teachers, especially those with advanced training and experience.**
- **Lack of Advanced Placement classes and an over-emphasis on community college classes for gifted students.**
- **Lack of training for teachers and administrators on issues of gifted education.**
- **Limited curricula due to small student populations and the need for remedial courses that compete for teacher time and resources.**
- **Accusations of "elitism" by community members.**
- **A sense of isolation for teachers dedicated to trying new methods and/or serving gifted and talented students.**

Schools in rural areas and small towns also have many advantages that provide benefits to gifted students, many of which are benefits that small schools provide to *all* students. The advantages most frequently mentioned include considerable individualized attention, familiarity and trust among members of a school community, opportunities for involvement in a large range of activities despite skill level (e.g., the school newspaper, sports teams, and student council), and participation and commitment from parents and community members.

Few of the fifty schools surveyed for the 1999 report had either gifted programs or, in the case of high schools, Advanced Placement courses. In many instances, students are identified as gifted, often due to state laws requiring such identification, but little to no programming is available. Many students indicated that the services they were offered seemed tacked onto their regular schedules and were perceived more as excuses to get out of class than as positive, worthwhile opportunities.

GIFTED VOICES FROM RURAL AMERICA (2001)

In our new report, *GIFTED VOICES FROM RURAL AMERICA (2001)*, we focus on unique schools and educators who creatively faced the challenges commonly experienced by rural and small-town schools but effectively developed programs to serve their gifted and talented students while maintaining their rural identity. Of the schools profiled here, two were created especially for gifted and talented students: Jackson River Governor's School in Virginia and the Native American Preparatory School in New Mexico. Another featured school, Nevada School of the Arts in California, has no gifted programming in part because of its reliance on differentiation and individualization, yet it has become a favorite local school for parents of academically gifted students, as well as artistically gifted students. In Colorado, tiny Idalia High School manages to offer several humanities Advanced Placement courses, and its student-centered writing program has won grants and awards, inspiring students with a range of talents and skill levels. Only one school in this report is a typical public school (i.e., not specifically designed for gifted students) and possesses a well-developed gifted program. Akron-Westfield in Iowa has managed to allay community concerns about elitism by producing a well-balanced program that opens its doors to community participation. With or without formal gifted programming, however, each of these schools, through various teachers and programs, serves gifted students well.

It must be noted, though, that these schools do not serve *all* students and *all* forms of giftedness. Given their size and limited resources, each of these educational communities has chosen its niche. Often it is a special teacher who leads the way and his

or her talents serve as the base for a program. In other cases, the unique nature and background of the local community decides the direction and needs of a school. The results are wonderful and applause-worthy, and yet students in the school with the strong writing program, for example, have few outlets for math and science, while students in the districts that have banded together to create a science and technology academy often do not have similar special programs for the arts.

Although some parents interviewed for this report wondered whether their children might have attained a better all-around education had they attended a school in a more urban area, no student we interviewed expressed regret at having grown up in a small or rural town. Even the rare student who thought that a local school was of poor quality is still happy to have a strong connection to the people in the community; this individual plans to return there to live and work following graduate school. Overall, the students with whom we spoke found their small towns to be more full of benefits than detriments. They are glad for the attention they received from teachers and other adults in their community; they appreciated having opportunities to participate in a wide variety of activities.

In the late 20th century, innovative educational programs (e.g., service learning or school-to-career) were designed to better unite communities and their schools. However, as these programs and others become popular, it is important to remember and appropriately hail the efforts of small schools that, by necessity, work closely with their communities. In many instances, the school is at the very heart of the community, just as schools commonly were a century ago. We must listen to the voices and wisdom of the people in these schools as we try to build better programs to serve some of the most able students in America's rural places.

As the Belin-Blank Center moves further toward its goal of helping rural and gifted students via identification, curricular programming, teacher training, statistical information and program evaluation, we want to highlight several schools that are facing various challenges, schools from a range of locales and with varying student populations. Each of these schools is creatively serving gifted students while continuing to respect the needs and heritage of their communities. None of these schools is trying to suburbanize their programs; rather, each respects local students and their backgrounds, the landscape, and the heritage of place. These are their voices.

II. A Room of One's Own

Akron-Westfield Community School

Wolff has sometimes wondered whether his children might have been better off in a larger school, but his daughter Kris unabashedly declares, "I love my town!" She says that although it is small, people have exceptional pride in their schools and children. "The whole community looks after you and supports you. I've always known there was someone I could turn to," she says.

At a Glance:

Akron-Westfield Community School District:
700 students (K-12)

Akron, IA:
pop. 1,500
Westfield, IA:
pop. 185

Nearest City of 50,000+:
Sioux City, IA (pop. 82,843), a half-hour drive

Gifted and Talented Program offered?
Yes, grades 3-12

AP classes offered at local high school?
No

Children below poverty in the school's county, 1995: 8.4%

Persons per square mile, 1999: 28.7

"More times than not, the TAG program, Ms. Banks, and the other kids saved me from difficulty with school or just life. That safe place and the connection with other kids was really essential," recalls Kris Wolff, now a college freshman. Many people associated with the program echo her assessment of the Talented and Gifted Program at Akron-Westfield High School in western Iowa. "Safe haven," "supportive," and "sanctuary" are some of the ways that students and parents have described teacher Renee Banks' TAG room.

With its comfortable oversized sofa, computing area, and refrigerator where students can stash a bag lunch, Banks' room is not your typical classroom. For one thing, it serves students grades 3 through 12, since the Akron-Westfield Community School houses all grades under one roof. Classical music is often playing, and plants hang in the window. A group of middle school students might be meeting with Banks at work tables for a formal class, while a high school kid sprawls on the sofa reading a novel, and another searches the Internet in the mini-computing lab set up in one corner.

Wes Phillips, also a college freshman and a former Banks student, says that like many of his friends, he went to the TAG room whenever he was caught up with his work in other classes—an option available to TAG students. "I learn well with music," says the three-time All-State musician, "so that was really helpful to me." Banks says that fidgety kinesthetic learners are also well-served by her open-door policy, dashing in during breaks or study time to work at the computer. The room serves as a sort of clubhouse for TAG students. They congregate there before school and during lunch, as much for socializing and mutual support as for academic time.

The Facilitator

Banks, who refers to herself as a facilitator rather than a teacher, has been the TAG coordinator at Akron-Westfield since 1990. Prior to that she worked as a counselor and music teacher, for a total of twenty-two years in the district. Students and parents credit her with the program's success, saying that school administrators have allowed her independence which she, in turn, has passed along to the students, allowing them to honor individual learning styles and follow unique paths of interest.

Akron, Iowa, located near the South Dakota-Iowa border and situated on the Rock River, a tributary of the Missouri, has a population of 1,500. Nearby Westfield is smaller still, with fewer than 200 people. The school is six miles outside of Akron and the district itself stretches twenty-six miles. Local physician Dr. David Wolff, who grew up in suburban Los Angeles but found himself to be a "Midwestern convert" following a short-term job in South Dakota, describes the area as hilly and pretty. "Akron is a Main Street town," he says, the kind commonly found all over the Midwest. It's the type of town where the hospital had to close when one of its doctors died and the other retired.

Despite its size—and, in part, because of it—Wolff and many other transplants enjoy the quality of life they've found in the small agriculture-based community. The much larger community of Sioux City is about a half hour away, offering opportunities that Akron cannot, such as several colleges and touring Broadway shows at its cultural center. With an open enrollment policy, however, it's not uncommon for residents of the outskirts of Sioux City to send their kids to school in Akron-Westfield, taking advantage of the district's excellent academic reputation.

Wolff has sometimes wondered whether his children might have been better off in a larger school, but his daughter Kris unabashedly declares, "I love my town!" She says that although it is small, people have exceptional pride in their schools and children. "The whole community looks after you and supports you. I've always known there was someone I could turn to," she says.

One of the most supportive places she found was Banks' TAG room. Beginning in third grade, students are identified for the program via teacher nominations, Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores, and the Renzulli et. al., checklist. Elementary and middle school students come to Banks for a minimum of three, forty-five minute classes per week. These are project-based classes that run sequentially, working in tandem with the students' regular curricula.

In high school, students have the option of taking TAG for credit by working with Banks to design their own course of study, or to stay part of the program via participation in once-a-week lunch classes called "Group Meets." Most students who do TAG for credit (four students out of the thirty-two high school TAG students as of Fall 2000) also participate in the lunch meetings. Banks says that during her ten years with the program, ninety-five percent of students have opted to remain active in the program throughout their time in the district.

Linda Weir, a Curriculum Development Consultant at Western Hills Area Education Agency 12, gives high marks to the Akron-Westfield program. "It's inclusive, not exclusive," she observes. "It meets the students' needs. It is sequential and has a lot of depth, building on their skills rather than being just an event-centered program. Renee does a great job of weaving critical thinking throughout the curriculum." Weir credits the entire district for its use of New Standards and Dimensions of Learning, a school reform initiative philosophy.

Iowa is alone among the states in its absence of state standards; it has put the onus on individual school districts to create their own standards and benchmarks. Banks recently completed this task, writing out the standards for the gifted program. It was an

opportunity to reflect on her beliefs and what she knows to be a success in the classroom. In turn, her students are very aware of the standards and how their work fits into them. "Relevant" is another word her students often use to describe the work that goes on in Banks' room.

Focus on History Day

A key component of students' sense of relevancy, as well as the inclusion that Weir notes, comes via History Day, a school-wide event spearheaded by Banks. Any middle or high school student interested in history, not just TAG students, can be involved in the event. (Banks spends half her time with identified students and the other half facilitating programs for self-selected groups of students. In addition to teaching a middle school, non-TAG class for History Day, for example, she teaches a six-week Character Counts class for all middle schoolers.) Although the majority of participants come from the TAG program, Banks believes that opening the doors to all students has really helped to build bridges between TAG and other parts of the school: "There's gained respect for TAG students and the level at which they work."

Many high school students, who often pull out all the stops for the nearly yearlong projects, seem to remember every last exhausting, stimulating detail of the process. Beginning with topic selection before winter break and going, at least, until the first competition in March, History Day is a bonding experience. It's a time when students push themselves as learners to their utmost while also gaining insight and skills from their peers.

As a sophomore, Kris Wolff made it through the hoops, being selected to go to the district competition from her school, then to state, and finally to nationals in Washington, D.C. Although she didn't win, she was impressed by the amount of effort she saw in the other competitors' projects, and she vowed she'd return and be "someone to mess with" in the future. During her senior year, along with Wes Phillips and Katie Book, she again went to nationals. The group had chosen to study the polio vaccine and divided their work to suit each member's strengths, so that Wolff did most of the writing and Phillips much of the research. He logged hours on microfiche machines, including some time spent at the Library of Congress. It paid off when they won a top award for use of newspapers. Both young people's voices light up at the memory, not so much of winning, but of the gratification of the work itself.

During two of Wes Philips' visits to the east coast in conjunction with History Day, he was also able to participate in one-day job shadowing experiences, something Banks and Akron-Westfield's school-to-career coordinator Sharon Frerichs helped him to organize. The first was at *USA Today*'s graphic design department, and the second was

with an engineering firm. Wes learned about many different jobs and the kinds of training and education required of individual employees. Unlike some of his regular classes back home, where Wes often wasn't sure why he and his classmates were learning certain things, it was exciting to see the connections between academic study and job skills. Here calculus was being used; there was a specific form of computer programming. "It really motivated me and kept me going through that last year of school," he recalls.

I like the stuff that I hate. I like that I know everybody. I like that people know me and my family. That it's safe and no one locks their doors at night. But some of that stuff drives me crazy too. I don't like it that few people have very open minds—this is a fairly conservative place. There's little diversity, not many viewpoints.

– Catherine Maki, 12th grade, Candor New York, describing the pros and cons of living in a small town

Staying Motivated

Motivation is key to many students' participation in the Akron-Westfield TAG program. Living across the border in South Dakota, Brenda Hope's daughter Kimberley was decreasingly challenged and increasingly frustrated by school. Despite her parents' attempts to start a gifted program ("we were told that any program had to be open to all students"), Kimberley was begging her parents to home school her by the time she reached seventh grade.

Brenda and her husband decided a bigger action was necessary at that point and decided to enroll their daughter in Akron-Westfield. A minor legal battle ensued when they had to prove to the court the limitations they faced in their local school and the need to cross state lines. They prevailed, and, Brenda says, her daughter has had more opportunities in one year at Akron-Westfield than in her previous six. "The TAG program has broadened her horizons and stimulated her for other classes because she has this new outlet for creativity." Before, kids only wanted to sit next to Kimberley to copy her papers. She took pains not to appear different. Now, she has a group of friends who are as enthusiastic and committed to learning as she is.

Another student, whose family moved from South Dakota so that she and her sister could attend the Akron-Westfield TAG program, has since been working on a novel about Armenians. Banks recalls that the family's former school district was cutting funding and programming for gifted students, when the mother called her to learn more about the Akron-Westfield program. Shortly after they settled into Banks' program, the oldest daughter, then in eighth grade, earned a Composite Score of 32 on the ACT Assessment. When she indicated an interest in writing a novel, Banks provided her time and support in the TAG room and then found her a mentor: the high school English teacher who had attended the prestigious University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. "I don't pretend to be an expert in everything," says Banks. "An important part of my job is finding appropriate mentors and teachers for kids with special interests."

PROUD TO BE A FARM GIRL

By Dana Thomann

Bottle-fed baby lambs, squealing pigs, newborn kittens, sweet smelling straw—didn't everyone grow up in a lively atmosphere with these things?

The startling revelation struck me at the tender age of five: Not everyone grew up on a farm. I discovered this fact when I was sent to the babysitter in town for the first and last time. When my mother returned to pick me up (she had been helping my father haul grain, something she labeled as too dangerous for me to be present), I begged that she never leave me again. Don't get me wrong, my babysitter was great. I was just used to being a farm girl.

As I evolved into a teenager, the concept of farm girl didn't seem too hip. It actually began to embarrass me. Everyone around me would say, "hick farmers" or "hick red-neck farmers." I wasn't about to associate myself with these wicked stereotypes.

When I met new people who didn't know my background, I wouldn't dare tell them I lived on a farm. I was afraid I would automatically be labeled as a "hick." When being dropped off from slumber parties, I would worry the whole ride home. What if it smelled like pigs outside when they let me off? What if my father was outside in his Carharts and muddy boots? What would everyone think of me?

My mother has had to endure social scrutiny for her occupation. At a social gathering, she was asked by the surrounding ladies what she did for a living. When my mother replied she worked full time on the family farm, they laughed at her.

"You've got to be kidding, right?" they asked.

As farming prices plummet, family farms like ours have become an endangered species—an endangered species losing the suffocating battle against IBP, Murphy "Family" Farms, and other corporate producers. Once fertile farmland now is being turned into housing developments. I have realized how stupid I was to take my farm life for granted. Family farmers only make up two percent of the population. I am a rarity, a minority. I have begun to embrace the idea that I am included in this struggling-to-stay-afloat minority.

I rejoice in the fact that my father and mother do not attend nine-to-five jobs. Because of this, I was seldom put in a babysitter's hands. My parents might be leading a less glamorous life compared to a stockbroker or a lawyer, but I have been made into a richer person as a result. The best part about being a farm child is that my parents raised me. Their morals and work ethic have shaped who I am. Most kids do not get the unique opportunity to go to work every day with their parents or have them close at hand during their childhood like I have.

Continued on next page

Knocking down barriers between the community and the classroom is key to many of Banks' projects. For History Day, high school students have adult mentors—a combination of teachers, parents, and other community members—depending on their topics and expertise. In turn, the high school students often serve as mentors for younger students' projects, something that's easy to do in the K-12 building. When it comes time to assess student work, Banks invites community members, including school board members, to participate. At state TAG conferences, Weir says that Banks stands out as someone who brings a unique conglomeration of community members with her, not all of whom have an obvious connection to the TAG program. In this manner, she has built bridges between what could be an isolated program, viewed as elitist, and the rest of the school and community.

Valorie Phillips, who is Wes' mother and also an aid in the elementary school, says that Banks' strategies and commitment have paid off. "Support for the TAG program has really increased in recent years. Sometimes we've had to convince the board of the value of this program; any time there's a program where some kids get to go and some don't, there's lack of support. But today, people generally seem to understand and respect its worth."

Although Banks has many supporters and allies among the faculty, such as the aforementioned English teacher and the honors-level math teacher, other colleagues are less understanding of the need for the TAG program. Banks constantly advocates for her students via emails with other teachers and she believes this grassroots delivery system has been more effective than in-services about gifted education. Still, she knows the needs of gifted students aren't high on the list of concerns of many of her colleagues. "Teachers are trying to keep their heads above water with diversity, and they just don't have time for everything coming at them. I have good support, especially from the administration, but in terms of getting other teachers to think about and practice differentiation in the classroom, well there's not much of that going on."

Added Challenge

Among Banks' older students and recent graduates, one of the few regrets that any of them have with their education is the lack of access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses, or other college-credit earning programs. Both Wolff and Phillips said it was a bit discouraging to get to college and feel just as prepared as their new classmates, if not more so, but to lack the semester hours some of them had already gained via AP. Although Iowa does have post-secondary options and colleges are available to students in Sioux City, many students are so

There are even more perks to living on a farm. When I ran cross country, I had my own 160-acre course to run every day. I've been able to be involved in 4-H with my palomino quarter horse, Chaszz. Employers like to hire farm kids because we appreciate the value of a dollar. I was able to get a conversation struck up with a famous person once by saying, ""Hey, I'm from the farm."

It is a shame only a small minority will be able to grow up in this environment. It is even a greater shame that society is losing this family-oriented tradition.

Call me what you want, you may even call me the dreaded "H" word if you insist; it only shows ignorance on your part.

Yeah, I am the girl sitting next to you in class, the one who enjoys playing the violin and going to see theater and dance performances, the girl relaxing in the coffee shop, the one who plans on attending university in the fall. That's me...a pure hick!

Last week, I was at Wal-Mart picking up cat food for our twenty outdoor farm cats. The clerk insisted that he help me with the twenty-pound sack, but it was thirty pounds lighter than a sack of pig feed. "No, I can get it," I told him with confidence. "I'm a farm girl."

Dana Thomann is a senior at Highland High School. She lives outside Riverside, IA (pop. 824) on her family's farm. She plans to attend either The University of Iowa or The University of Missouri beginning in Fall 2001, and she is an identified gifted student. She has participated in the Belin-Blank Center's summer program for elementary school students. Currently, she is a member of the *Iowa City Press-Citizen*'s Student Editorial Board; this essay is reprinted with permission from the *Iowa City Press-Citizen*.

involved with extra-curricular activities (one of the primary benefits of a small school is the access to sports, music, and other activities), that they're not able to take the extra six hours or so out of the school week that the commute and class time would entail.

A recent exception to this occurred last year, however, when Dr. Wolff worked with Banks to create an anatomy-physiology class. He was able to get staff credentials from a nearby community college, allowing the students who enrolled in his course to earn college credit. For an entire school year, Wolff led five students through the rigorous course, meeting every Sunday from five to ten in the evening (the students chose the hours). The course was grueling, and several of them decided medical school was not for them as a result, but they all made it through with hardly a class meeting missed.

Kris Wolff, who said it wasn't too awkward having her father as an instructor, said the class provided her an important sense of confidence. "That was the first time any of us had struggled in a classroom," she remembers. "But I had a strong feeling of, 'THIS is what I've been waiting for!' I'd always been afraid that when I got into a situation where I was truly challenged, I wouldn't be up for it; I'd come up short. This was an opportunity to prove to myself that even though it's hard, I could rise above it. It gave me a new level of commitment to academics."

Now that they're in college, Wolff and Phillips both carry the confidence they gained from the TAG program with them. During the Group Meets at lunch in high school, they learned a lot of valuable lessons about themselves as learners, as Banks covered subjects such as learning styles and social-emotional issues of giftedness students. Students gained a holistic sense of themselves as learners via the program, something Phillips says benefited him more than an "added work" TAG program would have.

Today, when he has a lot of studying to do or an imposing exam on the horizon, Phillips puts on his earphones and listens to a CD of piano music that Banks gave him for graduation. It's music that she often played in the TAG room, and hearing it takes him back to that safe place where he felt understood and comfortable, supported to do the best work he could.

III. Forming Partnerships for New Opportunities

Jackson River Governor's School

Now, one bus winds its way through Bath County's steep, curvy roads every morning, picking up students on their way to both Governor's School classes and vocational classes. Smith went a step further with his ingenuity, securing the bus driver a part-time maintenance job at the community college, so that he's paid and active while students are in class.

At a Glance

Jackson River Governor's School: 38 students

School District: Students from seven surrounding divisions feed into the Governor's School

Clifton Forge, VA: 4,679 (Clifton Forge is one of the more populous towns in the area serving the Governor's School)

Nearest city of 50,000+: Roanoke, VA (pop. 98,000), a one-hour drive

Gifted and Talented? The majority of districts feeding into the Governor's School have GT programs, although some are more active than others.

AP courses offered in the high school? The majority of districts feeding into the Governor's School offer AP courses.

Children below poverty in the school's county, 1995: 18.2%

Persons per square mile, 1999: 27.3

"We're in an area where about the only way you can survive is through collaboration and forming partnerships," says Dr. David Smith, superintendent of Bath County Schools, a school division located in the heart of the Allegheny Mountains, on the far western edge of Virginia. Seven neighboring school divisions (Virginia's term for what are called "districts" in many states) have come together to form an exceptional partnership on behalf of their gifted students, creating the Jackson River Governor's School for Science, Mathematics, and Technology.

The school, which enrolled its first group of high school juniors and seniors in August 2000, is located on the campus of Dabney S. Lancaster Community College in Clifton Forge, Virginia. Students from the seven school divisions—Alleghany Highlands, Bath County, Botetourt County, Buena Vista, Covington, Lexington, and Rockbridge County—are eligible for enrollment in the school. Each school has at least six slots available at Jackson River; participants are chosen based on test scores, grades, teacher recommendations, and student/parent interest.

Dr. Martin Loughlin, superintendent of Alleghany Highlands, is the person who first saw a need for the school and shepherded it through to creation. Beginning in about 1998, he began to feel more and more strongly that the gifted high school students in his division needed more options than they were currently offered through Advanced Placement (AP), dual enrollment, and distance learning courses. Math, science, and technology were the subjects in which students who excelled were most likely to hit a wall with regard to options, he says.

The superintendent worried about the interpersonal effects of being gifted in a small area: "We are rural and we have so few truly gifted students. They feel ill at ease when being separated out in their high school for advanced studies and can be hesitant to show their giftedness to their peers. There's a fear of being called a nerd in a high school with an extremely high number of athletic participants and where sports are king."

A school is born in less than two years

Loughlin turned to the Governor School model, which has been serving Virginia's gifted students since 1973 (see sidebar). He believed that if several nearby divisions banded together, they could establish a half-day program that would provide students with added challenge during morning classes and then allow them to return home in time for electives, humanities core subjects, and after-school activities such as music and athletics.

"The main advantage we have," he said, referring to the relatively remote, mountainous region—the backbone of Appalachia—in which his and other nearby divisions are located, "are two four-lane highways bisecting our area." This means that a total of six rural high schools are within a one-hour distance of the community college that services all six high schools and which is located at the intersection of the two highways. (Although seven school divisions are involved in the Governor's School, two of them share a high school, making for a total of six participating high schools.)

Loughlin quickly garnered the support of the community college president, as well as the other division superintendents. In addition, they secured a grant from the Western Virginia Public Education Consortium at Radford University to do a feasibility study, and then submitted it to the state for additional funding. Within eighteen months, Loughlin's Governor School plans went from dream to reality. There was one tense moment along the way when the state board of education and the state legislature got their communication wires crossed: the latter had decided that no new Governor Schools would be funded for the coming year, but the former had already approved plans for Jackson River to go ahead. Once the confusion was realized and all parties saw the amount of work Loughlin's team had accomplished, the way was quickly cleared for the school to move ahead.

Considering the lightening speed with which Jackson River was organized, everyone involved says the first year has gone smoothly. Dr. Susan Rollinson, who had worked with local gifted programs for years as a volunteer, was tapped to be the school's director. "I expressed interest in teaching chemistry if they got the school off the ground," she laughs, "and the next thing I knew, I was the director!" Rollinson came on board in January 2000 with the task of recruiting students, cementing the curriculum and schedule, and finalizing the state's approval.

All of the local school boards agreed to send students to Jackson River for at least three years, ensuring a student base. Still, Rollinson had to find students who were excited enough to sign up. She began by meeting with guidance counselors and creating a brochure for students and parents. She and the school's board narrowed the curriculum to six classes for the first year—three for juniors and three for seniors, including calculus, physics, environmental science, and statistics, as well as a variety of computer classes.

Opening doors despite scheduling conflicts

Some of the students worried they wouldn't measure up to their peers from other schools, and parents had some anxiety about sending their children to a brand new program so late in their high school careers. But the draws of college professors (community college faculty teach classes especially for Jackson River students), the college's lab facilities, and a wider array of course offerings, eventually made it fairly easy for Rollinson to enroll thirty-eight students for the first year. "Many of the seniors had taken virtually everything their [home] school offered," she says.

A case in point is Shital Godhania, who says she had taken the highest level of math and science offered by her home school, Covington High School. By attending Jackson River and taking higher-level classes with other motivated students, she feels more confident about her abilities than she would have otherwise. As a senior, she is applying to the post-secondary institutions like the University of Virginia, The College of

VIRGINIA'S GOVERNOR SCHOOLS

(reprinted from http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Govschools/)

The Virginia Governor's School Program began in 1973 when Governor Linwood Holton established the first summer residential programs for 400 gifted students from across the commonwealth. From its beginnings, with three summer schools in 1973, the program has expanded to more than 40 sites throughout the commonwealth.

Virginia Governor's Schools provide some of the state's most able students academically and artistically challenging programs beyond those offered in their home schools. With the support of the Virginia Board of Education and the General Assembly, the Governor's Schools presently include summer residential, summer regional, and academic-year programs serving more than 6,500 gifted students from all parts of the commonwealth.

Three types of Governor's Schools provide appropriate learning endeavors for gifted students throughout the commonwealth: Academic-Year Governor's Schools (AYGS), Summer Residential Governor's Schools (SRsGS), and the Summer Regional Governor's Schools (SRgGS).

The Virginia Department of Education, in conjunction with localities, sponsors regional Academic-Year Governor's Schools that serve gifted high school students during the academic year. In 2000-2001, fifteen Academic-Year Governor's Schools provided students with acceleration and exploration in areas ranging from the arts, to government and international studies, to global economics and technology, and to mathematics, science, and technology. Each school creates a program tailored to the needs of its students.

Academic-Year Governor's Schools vary in format. While three are full-day programs, fulfilling all requirements students need to graduate, most are part-time programs. Students in these schools spend a portion of their day at the Governor's Schools but rely on their high schools to provide other programming required for graduation. Students use computers, robotics, and other current technology in laboratory activities; they conduct in-depth research, work with other students to develop special projects and performances, and alongside mentors in business, industry, government, and universities gaining experiences that enhance their understanding of the content as well as contemporary career options.

The Academic-Year Governor's Schools have developed innovative ways to serve their students. Appomattox Regional Governor's School for the Arts and Technology, Central Virginia Governor's School, Roanoke Valley Governor's School, and Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology are housed in their own facilities.

Continued on next page

William and Mary, and Cambridge University in England.

Another Jackson River student, junior Anne Irvine, says that she was excited to attend as soon as she heard about the school. Although the academics were a major attraction, the social aspects were just as compelling. "I thought it was a good chance for me to be with other kids. My school is pretty small, with only about seventy kids in my class, so meeting new people seemed important." Irvine, who is class president at Parry McCluer High School and involved with several sports, is hardly a wallflower. She's enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people from other schools and she visits her new friends when attending sporting events at their schools, or via phone and email on weekends and during breaks.

"We all have a lot in common," Irvine says of her Jackson River classmates. "We have similar goals and interests. We're looking at the same colleges. Although I've never felt isolated because of my academic interests at my

school, it's nice to be around more kids who are into the same things." She says that students at the new school came together quickly as a group; after the first few months, they were routinely spending time with kids from schools other than their own.

If there have been any obstacles this first year, it has been scheduling. With six different daily school schedules and six different academic calendars, faculty and administrators have had to be very flexible. For example, Irvine and four other classmates from Parry McCluer, as well as students from one other school, arrive at Jackson River about a half hour earlier than most of their classmates and also leave earlier. A driver from the district picks Irvine up at 7:00 a.m. and returns her to school for her afternoon classes by around 11:00 a.m.; the drive takes about forty-five minutes and Irvine usually sleeps during the morning trip.

Early concerns and creative solutions

Logistics have been one of the more difficult aspects of organizing the new school. At Alleghany Highlands, for example, the Governor's School draws nineteen top students out of the building for half a day. The number is so high because Alleghany Highlands is the school in closest proximity to the community college campus, thus its students have filled spots that other schools didn't use. In order to meet the needs of the participating students, certain morning classes — a popular honors marine biology class, AP Government, and AP English — were moved to the afternoon. However, other classes, including foreign languages, drama, and physics and anatomy still meet in the morning. "You can't do everything," one teacher comments. "Kids and parents have to make choices and there are some people who think rearranging the entire schedule just for these kids isn't right."

Other Academic-Year Governor's Schools share campuses with high schools, community colleges/ universities, or professional organizations. The Governor's School for the Arts in Norfolk shares facilities at the Wells Theatre and with the Virginia Ballet. Several new schools are using interactive television to link multiple high school sites. A. Linwood Holton Governor's School is the commonwealth's first completely virtual Governor's School. Daily, students in more than 15 high schools in 13 counties in Southwest Virginia are taught through an Internet connection using "LearnLinc" and "Blackboard" software.

Faculties for the Academic-Year Governor's Schools are selected based on advanced degrees, professional experience, and training and/or experience with gifted high school students. Most teachers have the gifted add-on endorsement that represents post-graduate training in gifted education, and several are certified through the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Each school is responsible for providing staff development to extend its teachers' knowledge and use of innovative teaching strategies, technology, and contemporary subject matter.

The Academic-Year Governor's Schools are established as "joint schools" by Virginia school law. As such, they are typically managed by a regional governing board of representatives from the school boards of each participating division. The regional governing board is charged with developing policies for the school including the school's admissions process. While these processes differ from school to school, all applicants are assessed using multiple criteria by trained evaluators who have experience in gifted education and the focus area of the specific Academic-Year Governor's School.

Although all of the division superintendents were strongly supportive of the new school, some of the principals and teachers were less enthused. People were fearful about the effect of losing the top students for half the day. And there was a sense that something special was being done for these students in terms of opportunity and school spending that wasn't available for others. During the planning process, Rollinson remembers being asked: "Why should we waste our money on students who aren't going to come back and contribute to our communities after high school?" She wasn't overly surprised by the comment, as there has long been resentment among some community members toward gifted students, deriving mainly from people who aren't generally supportive of education and don't understand the need for higher education.

One of the division superintendents had a creative response to this kind of thinking. Parents of students in the vocational program immediately voiced to Dr. David Smith, superintendent of Bath County Schools, concerns about the expense of Jackson River for the benefit of a small number of students. The most mountainous of the divisions, Bath County has no sizable town center and has a total population of 4,800. Smith sat down with members of the community college and came up with a plan that would allow his high school vocational students to take classes at the community college that would lead to certification in programs such as welding. Now, one bus winds its way through Bath County's steep, curvy roads every morning, picking up students on their way to both Governor's School classes and vocational classes. Smith went a step further with his ingenuity, securing the bus driver a part-time maintenance job at the community college, so that he's paid and active while students are in class.

"Everyone wins," says Smith of the arrangement. "The vocational kids' parents are thrilled. Students who never would have thought of going to college are now getting a taste for it. The community college benefits through increased enrollment, increased visibility, and the possibility of attracting students who wouldn't otherwise have considered an AA degree. And none of it would have been possible if the Governor's School hadn't been in place."

Challenges of a beautiful but remote locale

Smith says the school has brought new possibilities to his top students. Although Bath County and all of the other divisions, with the exception of one, offer AP courses, that's becoming more difficult to do because of hiring problems. "Staffing is one of our greatest challenges," says Smith. Not only is there a statewide shortage of teachers, but attracting young teachers to such a remote area—there are no stoplights in Bath County, nor any fast food—is very difficult. When Bath County lost an AP biology instructor last year, the new teacher didn't have the proper qualification, including an M.A. in biology, to be able to teach the course and it had to be cancelled.

FROM APPALACHIA TO THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Students in the Alleghany Highlands marine biology class spend much of the school year dreaming of tropical fish, pristine beaches, and freshly-squeezed pineapple juice. At spring break, their dreams become reality, when they travel to the island of St. John, the smallest of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Although it is just nine miles long and five miles wide, for most of the students, it's their most exotic travel destination to date.

During their seven-day visit, the students investigate the island's coral reef and send their data to a non-profit organization called REEF that studies and protects these endangered ecological systems. Students spend the entire academic year preparing for the trip, learning to identify the fish and invertebrates that live around St. John. The class meets every other day for a one and a half hour block, so it's a large academic commitment.

Many students put in additional work outside the classroom in order to afford the trip, which comes with a $1,200-per-student price tag. Many hours of babysitting and lawn mowing, as well as class bake sales, dances, and other fundraisers, go into preparing for the trip.

But the efforts are always worthwhile. "This trip changes students' lives," Jane DeGroot, the class' teacher says. "For kids who have hardly been away from home before—many of them have never flown—this is a chance to see a whole new culture, a whole new environment."

One student, Cole, who went on the Year 2000 trip, describes his favorite aspects of the St. John journey this way: "The beach, the sea, the coconuts, the people, the laid-back atmosphere, the girls, the sun, the jeeps, the cruise, the hike, the research, even the paper... it was all a once-in-a lifetime experience and I know it's something I'll never forget."

Many students make dramatic changes following the trip, including one particularly gifted student who was less adept socially; following his St. John experience, he gained confidence in his ability to interact with others. Another student, who had been adopted into a very large family, had raised every dime to pay for the trip herself. "She'd had a rough life," recalls DeGroot. "She just blossomed after that trip."

Coming from a heavily forested, mountainous area, the students are astounded when their plane hovers over clear blue water, white sands, and an island that is almost wholly covered with tropical vegetation. In addition, coming from a place that is very culturally and ethnically homogenous, the opportunity to interact with the natives of St. John, who are black and of West Indies descent, is an eye-opener. Suddenly, the students realize there is a bigger world out there. This lesson is just as important as the memorization of fish and invertebrates, much of which they'll probably be able to recall well into their later years.

A teacher at Alleghany Highlands says that state standards have also affected course offerings: "They're becoming more limited because some of our kids don't have the depth and breadth of knowledge to do well on standards of learning tests. The repercussion is that we've had to offer a lot more core-level, remedial classes, so electives and upper-level courses get cut. I think this is very tied to our situation, in terms of enrollment and funding, as a rural school."

Although the area served by Jackson River is a gorgeous spot that is popular with tourists—about half of the land in the area is national forest—it has not been able to attract new industry. Paper processing and some other blue-collar industry are the main employment, along with tourism, which pays notoriously low wages. Smith says that students who don't go the vocational route tend to leave the area after graduation because there simply aren't viable jobs for them. While many of the students in the Governor's School have parents who are involved with education or who work in some of the relatively few professional positions (e.g., Anne Irvine's father is a commonwealth attorney), other students are "mountain kids." For many of these students, college is not part of their family heritage. If they are able to attain any kind of higher education it's usually at the community college level via scholarship.

Todd Fridley, a senior at Alleghany Highlands and Jackson River, lives in a valley between two mountains in one of the most rural areas of his school division. It takes him about a half hour to drive to school in his four-wheel drive truck. His family's nearest neighbors are his grandparents and uncle, who raise cattle, goats, and chickens. Todd's father works at the nearby paper plant. His brother recently graduated from Dabney S. Lancaster Community College with a degree in forestry, but has not been able to find a well-paying job and has opted instead for a management position in food service. The only member of Todd's family to attend a four-year institution was an uncle.

Despite what might be considered historical challenges to attending college, Todd is hoping to go to the University of Virginia next year and has early plans to major in biomedical engineering. He thinks the Governor's School has better prepared him to meet that goal by giving him the opportunity to work with other students who are academically competitive and by providing more challenging classes. He notes that while his high school also offers calculus, the class he takes through Jackson River—though it meets less frequently than the class at Alleghany Highlands—is currently about three chapters ahead, working at an accelerated rate.

For Todd and other students from this Appalachian corner of Virginia, Jackson River Governor's School has been a win-win situation for everyone involved. Believers in the school, like Superintendent Smith, think that the early problems, such as parental concerns and scheduling, have been quickly addressed. For now, the school appears to be set on a clear course to serve as many as sixty students in its second year.

RESOURCES:

For more information about the marine biology class: http://www.myschoolonline.com/folder/0,1872,50791-46987-53-12501,00.html

For more information about Virginia's Governor Schools, see: http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/Govschools/

Jackson River Governor's School http://www.dl.cc.va.us/jrgs/

IV. *End of the Road*

The Kenai Peninsula

She wonders if in a few years the community won't have to change. Through computers or snippets of cultural information gleaned from trips into Homer the students know about current music groups and movie stars. They are curious. And yet many of them don't immediately consider themselves Americans. At Thanksgiving several kids asked Showman if they were getting out of school for "one of our holy days or one of yours."

At a Glance

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District: 10,300 students

Voznesenka: pop. 300

Voznesenka School: 136 students

Nearest city of 50,000+: Anchorage

Gifted and Talented program? Yes

Advanced Placement offered in high school?: No

Children below poverty in school's county, 1995: 12.5%

Persons per square mile, 1999: 3

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District covers 25, 000 square miles and includes forty schools. To travel from Hope, the northernmost town in the district, to Nanwalek School on the southern tip of the peninsula, requires four hours of driving time and a half-hour plane ride across Kachemak Bay.

Getting almost anywhere on the Kenai Peninsula is challenging; one doesn't hop in the car and get onto the interstate. When Jill Showman taught in Nanwalek, she had to take a plane to do her grocery shopping. When lucky, she'd get the "big" plane, an eight-seater. Otherwise, she had an easy commute, since her apartment was above the school.

Showman has lived and taught on the Kenai Peninsula for four years. She started at Skyview High School in Soldotna, a booming school of more than six hundred students, and then moved to tiny Nanwalek for two years. There, she was the high school teacher for a K-12 school of fifty-nine students, almost all of whom receive free or reduced lunch. Beginning in fall 2000, she moved again after getting a chance to teach Russian, one of the subjects in which she is certified, at Voznesenka.

Not a born-and-bred Alaskan, Showman ended up in the 49th state through a series of coincidences. She grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and attended the nearby University of Iowa. After finishing her bachelor's degree in 1995, she cobbled together a series of odd jobs, including teaching Russian part-time for a rural school district, selling educational software, and working for a women's shelter. She found herself talking by phone to a principal in Alaska one day during her sales job. As they chatted, the man asked why a certified teacher was selling software.

"Because I can't find a full-time job!" Showman lamented.

"Maybe you're in the wrong place," the man replied, recruiting her through the phone lines. "There are plenty of jobs up here!"

It didn't take long before Showman had located the Kenai in her atlas. She contacted the local district and, sure enough, there were several openings for the coming school year. She faxed her resume and within a month was interviewing for a job via telephone.

Arriving at her new home, she was immediately struck by the intensely fresh, clear air and the frequent play of the Northern Lights dancing across the night sky. When she heard late night noises outside the window of her apartment, it took her a week to figure out that a moose was bedding down right outside, serenading her with its heavy breathing. Later, when she hit a deer with her car, she learned that there's a list of families waiting to receive deer meat, underlining to her the poverty of many residents, as well as the waste-not-want-not mentality.

Another feature of the Kenai that differed from her midwestern concept of "rural" as being comprised of cornfields and grain silos was the peninsula's four Russian Old Believer villages. As a teacher at Voznesenka, one of the villages, she has had an intimate look

at this small, isolated culture that is largely unknown to many Americans.

The Russian Old Believers left Russia at various times, fleeing religious persecution and disputes in Russian Christianity that now span centuries. Most of the people who live in Voznesenka today are descendents of Old Believers who resettled to China in the 1700s and then moved again to Brazil in the 1940s. With each move, the group experienced further splintering, as some people sought an easing of traditions and others became more orthodox. Some of the group moved to Oregon during the 1960s, and then a yet smaller group more recently established a home in Voznesenka.

At present, about 300 Old Believers live in the village. The school serves 136 children, Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Only two students are presently identified as gifted, through test scores and teacher recommendations. The older of the two, a high school sophomore named Essia, takes advanced classes via an Internet school and is student council president.

Showman says Essia stands out academically among his peers and is notably more conscientious. He has designed the school's web site and is a strong, self-motivated student. Although Essia's father is a teacher (the only Old Believer teacher in the school) and is thus part of a family that may value contemporary education more than others, she sees his educational opportunities—and those of other gifted students in the village—to be limited both by the school's small size and the village's isolation.

There's no definite assumption that most Voznesenka students will go to college. This is particularly true of girls, for whom even a high school diploma is viewed as unnecessary by some families. Maintaining tradition is what underlies many aspects of village life, so parents fear that a young person who leaves the area for college will either not return or will forget his or her

In August 2000, a commercial fisherman and his daughter found a dead harbor porpoise on the beach just north of Ninilchik, Alaska. Knowing the biology teacher at the local high school had been looking for a porpoise, the fisherman called him right away. The teacher, Chris Hanson, got approval from state and federal officials to remove the porpoise from the beach, and then stored it temporarily in his freezer.

Hanson planned to have his students strip down the mammal's carcass and then assemble the skeleton. But when Hanson's students began work on the porpoise, along with a porcupine found on a local road, the going quickly got tough. It was like an enormous jigsaw puzzle.

They turned to a man from nearby Homer who had long made a hobby of working on animal skeletons, especially those of whales. Lee Post has worked with students all over Alaska, as well as with several museums. His instructions led students through the arduous task of boiling parts of the animals in order to remove the bones from the meat.

Student Yukonna Norman was ready for the grisly work, having watched her mother prepare moose skulls for mounting. When she realized that part of the porcupine leg and foot assigned to her were missing, she made clay molds of the opposite leg and recreated the missing pieces. Many of the students, including Yukonna, said the project taught them patience and attention to detail.

Hanson says that the students' interest has been piqued by the project. They've also gained the respect and help of local agencies who are now eager to help with future projects by providing bear and moose skulls to the class collection. Meanwhile, Hanson is on the lookout for a sea otter or a wolf. The school's mascot, after all, is a wolverine.

Adapted from the *Peninsula Clarion*.

upbringing while away. One girl who recently left to attend college in Anchorage, for example, may not be eagerly accepted back, Showman suspects.

Similar to Hasidic Jews or Amish Mennonites, the Russian Old Believers try to live as much as possible by the traditions of an earlier time. The girls at Voznesenka all wear long dresses and boys wear tunics; full beards are found on the men in town and married women cover their heads. These traditions extend to the classroom. Contemporary recorded music, film projectors, televisions and VCR's are not allowed in the classroom. Some students can use computers, while others' parents have asked that they be avoided.

For Showman, who primarily teaches Russian (she is also the school's librarian, the Kindergarten art teacher, and a reading teacher), this creates limitations on her curriculum. She'd like students, for example, to read online Russian newspapers and follow current events. (Although all students in Voznesenka speak Russian at home, they do not know how to write the language; they use an archaic form of Russian, similar to Old English.) There are many useful documentaries and informational programs that could expand her classroom offerings, but her hands are tied.

She feels this will probably hamper the most talented students who choose to continue on to higher education. "Many other kids attending college will have had educational opportunities and travel experiences that a student like Essia won't have experienced," Showman says. "He may be gifted here, but he'll probably have some difficulties in college. He hasn't had Advanced Placement courses or been exposed to a wide variety of subjects."

She wonders if in a few years the community won't have to change. Through computers or snippets of cultural information gleaned from trips into Homer (dubbed "the end of the road," Homer is the largest nearby town, population 4,000, and home to Showman and most of the other teachers at Voznesenka, all but one of whom are not Old Believers) the students know about current music groups and movie stars. They are curious. And yet many of them don't immediately consider themselves Americans. At Thanksgiving, several kids asked Showman if they were getting out of school for "one of our holy days or one of yours."

Both the natural beauty of her surroundings and the friendliness of the Kenai's residents captivate Showman. The opportunity to work with such diverse ethnic groups (at Nanawelk, her students were *Sugpiaq*, a mix of Aleut and Russians), albeit in remote, rural areas has been a rare opportunity. She's not sure how long she will stay; though, if she were to return to Iowa, it would suddenly feel surprisingly urban. Even at the small Iowa high school where she taught part-time, in a district with just over 1,000 students, people traveled much more often and spent time in larger communities. On the Kenai, where even groceries can sometimes mean a plane ride, the world is a small and finitely connected place.

Resources:
Kenai Peninsula Borough School District:
http://www.kpbsd.k12.ak.us/default.htm

Voznesenka School:
http://www.kpbsd.k12.ak.us/voz/

V. Boomtown Charts a Course for the Arts

Nevada City School of the Arts (NCSA)

Many members of the NCSA community are quick to say that it is not a typical rural school, but is there a typical rural school? Its locale certainly could not be much more rural. Located twenty minutes outside of Nevada City, only deer, fox, and the bubbling Yuba River keep students company. What people might be saying is that such a strong arts focus is rare for a small school in a remote locale.

At a Glance

Nevada City, CA: pop. 2,900

Twin Ridges Elementary School District: 590 students

Nevada City School of the Arts: 216 students

Nearest city of 50,000+: Roseville, (pop. 77,048), a forty-five minute drive from Nevada City

Gifted and Talented program? No

AP classes offered at local high school? No

Children below poverty in school's county, 1995: 13.6%

Person's per square mile, 1999: 96.1

At Nevada City School of the Arts, an arts-based charter school in north-central California, students are equally likely to be the child of a logger, a sculptor, or a web site developer. Although Nevada City (population 2,900) is quite homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity, it is uniquely varied in its socioeconomic composition for a rural place. The mix is the result of the area's pristine beauty and natural bounty. Nestled in the Sierra Nevada foothills, the landscape is thick with forests and dissected by a rollicking river. It is a setting that has often been a magnet for those in search of a better place.

Nevada City got its start as a gold rush town, and was then a logging community through much of the twentieth century. The town's population dwindled until the 1960s and early 70s when the back-to-the-land movement brought young city dwellers in search of a new way of life. Potters, painters, and poets converged on the hamlet, often building their own homes in the surrounding woods and ridges. The old blue collars and the new long hairs eventually forged a mutual trust, becoming neighbors.

The technology boom, which has radically transformed other parts of northern California, is bringing the next wave of newcomers to Nevada City: telecommuters, recently retired techno-millionaires, and the owners and employees of software and dot-com companies looking for a home base nearby but not in the center of Silicon Valley's congested and expensive thoroughfares. The result is the kind of growth most rural towns only experienced with the coming of the railroad or the discovery of gold. *The New York Times* reported that Nevada City's housing prices have jumped more in recent years than almost any other community in California. Another telltale sign of the growing cosmopolitan popularity is the recently-opened Starbucks coffee shop in neighboring Grass Valley (population 9,800).

A bounty of charter schools

The local schools reflect the panoply of populations that comprise this small town and offer a much higher degree of school choice than other similarly-sized communities. The Twin Ridges Elementary School District, of which Nevada City schools are a part, includes one school that is located in a gold rush era one-room schoolhouse and another that is a conglomeration of home school families. The district was formed through the merger of several rural school districts, and due to the remoteness of some of these schools, it is now the second-largest district geographically in California.

A unique quality of the district is its embrace of the charter school movement; it has banked heavily on charter schools as a way to improve education for local students. Thirty-six states have charter schools, and California has the most students enrolled in charter schools. Even so, Twin Ridges' enthusiasm for charters is unusual for rural schools. Of the 2,100 charter schools nationwide, about two-thirds are located in cities. And unlike many districts that implement charters as a way of improving lagging public schools, Twin Ridges' public schools have often been rated among the best in the state.

The district's parents support the range of choices offered by the charter schools and, in turn, the district has made itself a welcome sponsor to charters from outside the district. The state's charter school law allows districts to sponsor charters from outside of the district. Thus sponsorship of charters is ensured – even if a charter's local district is opposed. Many of the schools in Twin Ridges are not within easy driving distance of each other, as is the case with most school districts, but are scattered across northern California.

Twelve of the fifteen schools located in the Twin Ridges Elementary School District are charters. And in Nevada County, which has ten small school districts, there are ten charter schools—that's ten charters that are physically located in relatively close physical proximity, as opposed to being sponsored by a district and located elsewhere—making the county home to more charters per capita than anywhere else in the state.

Ms. Stroman is a tiny woman; she's sophisticated and proper. I think she's a genius. She knows something about everything. She'd never try to dissuade a student from something. She always supported you.

– Derek Montgomery, college senior, originally from Roscoe, Texas, recalling his gifted and talented teacher.

Focus on the arts

Nevada City School of the Arts (NCSA) was one of the earliest charters in the area. Founded in1993 by a group of parents and teachers, the school started without a permanent location and only served four elementary grade levels. Classes met in a church, people's homes, and even a graveyard. After subletting a section of a software developer's building, the school finally got its own space—a 20,500 square-foot facility complete with an open atrium/gallery, various art studios, and beautiful grounds in the midst of a second-growth forest—allowing it to serve more than two hundred students in Kindergarten through eighth grades. The hitch to this opulent space was that the move had to take place during spring break. So in March 2000, the entire school bonded together and moved science labs, textbooks, art supplies, and musical instruments in the course of a week. Few people went on vacation that year, but the level of members' commitment to the school was made clear.

Faculty, parents, and students often mention the kind of community responsibility and commitment necessary for such an audacious move as part of the school's appeal. Many people associated with rural schools chalk those qualities up to smallness. But at least one parent, Misha Renclair, who teaches art part-time at several other schools within the county and is also a yoga instructor (along with charter schools, Nevada City may have more yoga instructors per capita than most places in the U.S.), says she sees a stronger sense of focus, motivation, and happiness in NCSA students than at the other buildings she visits.

Many members of the NCSA community are quick to say that it is not a typical rural school, but is there a typical rural school? Its locale certainly could not be much more rural. Located twenty minutes outside of Nevada City, only deer, fox, and the bubbling Yuba River keep students company. What people might be saying is that such a strong arts focus is rare for a small school in a remote locale.

A charter school is a public school and may provide instruction in any of grades K-12. A charter school is usually created or organized by a group of teachers, parents and community leaders, or a community-based organization, and is usually sponsored by an existing local public school board or county board of education. Specific goals and operating procedures for the charter school are detailed in an agreement (or "charter") between the sponsoring board and charter organizers.

A charter school is generally exempt from most laws governing school districts, except where specifically noted in the law. California public charter schools are required to participate in the statewide assessment test, called the STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) program. The law also requires that a public charter school be nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices, and all other operations, and prohibits the conversion of a private school to a charter school. Public charter schools may not charge tuition and may not discriminate against any pupil on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, gender, or disability.

— Reprinted from the California Department of Education's Charter Schools web site, http://www.cde.ca.gov/charter/about.html.

Like the founders of other charter schools, the group who started NCSA was frustrated by the rules governing regular schools. They wanted more freedom to create their own curriculum and to hire teachers. Kathy Graddy, another NCSA parent and also an art teacher at the school, attended some of the planning meetings partly because she was frustrated by a very negative experience with one of her son's current teachers. "I liked the idea of a charter school," she says, "of not being bound by the same rules such as teacher tenure." With many parents like Graddy and other supportive community members involved in the arts themselves, the organizing group thought the arts could serve as a wonderful foundation for an all-around education.

In a recent report, school director Judi McKeehan wrote that, "At NCSA, fine and performing arts are a way of knowing and understanding the world—'creating a community of learners through the arts.'" Although the school started out by offering them as an embellishment to the regular curriculum, the arts are now integrated across the curriculum and are truly embedded. Students working on a history or science project, for example, employ the arts to come to a greater understanding of their subject.

NCSA students are grouped by grade level, with about thirty kids per grade meeting with a core subject matter teacher for language arts, science, math, and social studies. In addition, all students take Foundation Arts Classes in movement, music, drama, and visual arts. They also take Elective Arts Classes, which allow them to choose among such topics as Shakespeare, jazz, and bookmaking. Students in the upper grades have a wider range of electives that meet for longer periods; these classes are also smaller.

Three times a year, students share their work in an all-school exhibit, and twice a year NCSA hosts a performing arts exhibition of dance, music, interpretation, and poetry. Eighth grade graduation is a final opportunity for outgoing students to showcase their artistic accomplishments.

Passion from an early age

Many students at NCSA are average artists who enjoy the school's flexible curriculum and the arts approach. For truly artistically gifted students, however, the school is a unique opportunity to use the language they know best to communicate in a wide range of subjects and learn more fully than they might—an opportunity rarely allowed in a regular school.

Quin Graddy is such a student. He's been an exceptional artist for most of his life. His mother Kathy remembers him producing three-dimensional drawings of staircases and other architectural features beginning at around two or three years of age. She jokes that despite having gone to art school herself for many years, she still has problems with perspective. Since before he entered school, Quin has been able to wile away hours and hours with a drawing pad. Even now, at thirteen, drawing is his idea of a good time on a Friday night. His passion has been rewarded by inclusion in several public art exhibits in San Francisco intended for adult artists.

Such an unremitting interest in art might make many adolescents stand out among their peers, but Quin has other differences that draw attention to him. Born with a condition called *achromatopsia*, he is legally blind. He cannot see beyond twelve inches, sees no color, has poor peripheral vision, and needs low light and high contrasts. His parents moved to Nevada City from San Francisco when Quin was ready to start kindergarten because an ophthalmologist told them that the city's public schools couldn't serve his needs. Quin's grandparents live near Nevada City, so they looked at schools there and were surprised to find a public school with a strong program for the visually impaired.

Both Quin and his mother say that other kids are not immediately comfortable around him, making him feel somewhat isolated. Still, the intense arts focus of NCSA, which he began attending as a third grader, has helped Quin to shine and succeed, providing him with a stronger sense of focus and self-esteem. Next year, rather than attending the local high school, which is located in nearby Grass Valley and includes students from all over the county for a total student body of more than 3,000, Quin's family will move back to San Francisco where he is applying to several art-centric high schools.

Pride in flexibility

NCSA prides itself on addressing student needs on an individual basis, whether it be someone with the unique combinations of physical limitations and exceptional skills such as Quin, or a student who excels in math, or another who has behavioral problems. Teachers, parents, and students work together to develop an individual learning plan for each child, including a variety of short and long-term goals. The result is a school program that attracts gifted students—both artistically and intellectually gifted—as well as students who aren't succeeding at the regular public schools because of special needs that are not being addressed.

RURAL MINNESOTA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS

The Minnesota charter law has helped small rural communities create new innovative schools, and retain strong public schools which otherwise were in danger of being consolidated. This would have forced youngsters to go many miles from home, and might well have been the end of their innovative practices.

The Minnesota New Country School (MNCS) in Henderson, Minnesota, is frequently cited as another example of a newly-chartered school that is contributing to the economic vitality of its community as well as offering a distinctive educational choice for rural students. The school, started in 1994, is a secondary school, with a project-based curriculum serving 150 students, grades 7-12, who come from ten different districts. MNCS is located on the Main Street of Henderson, population 900.

Many of the projects MNCS students complete are drawn from community resources and local residents contribute their talents and knowledge to help students. The study of local issues and natural resources is a major focus of the school. The discovery of deformed frogs near the school five years ago resulted in a major research project, which has been extended to other outdoor studies. The school has received several awards and much recognition for their research.

The school also serves as a technical resource for the community. Originally billed as the first "computer infused" high school in the state, New Country has totally integrated technology into its program and offers technology training to the community. The school is open year round with extended hours in order to be accessible to the public. In addition, students offer their technical knowledge to help local businesses with technical problems, training and web site designs.

The local high school was consolidated and closed in 1991, and when the opportunity to attract and maintain another public high school came about, the community was excited. Many local people invested in the construction and eventual lease of the new building built near the downtown business district that houses the New Country School. When asked about that investment they readily will tell you it was well worth it for the community. It has strengthened the local economy, brought youth back to the community and contributed to a general spirit of optimism and activity around town.

By Dough Thomas, excerpted from Rural Policy Matters, July 2000. See http://www.ruraledu.org for more information.

Many parents of academically gifted students consider NCSA to be a perfect setting for their children because it's easy for them to work at their own pace and establish new challenges. The amount of individual attention students receive from the staff means that a teacher can set higher expectations for one student and be able to provide him or her adequate supervision and assessment to make the extra challenge meaningful. The small, close-knit nature of the school also prevents gifted students from feeling like outcasts.

As the core subject teacher for the eighth grade, Victor Prussack has both Quin and Molly Rose in his class. Last year, he was their seventh grade core teacher, so he knows both students well. While Prussack must be sure that he provides enough time for Quin to complete tasks that can be difficult because of the boy's restricted eye sight and also be sensitive to Quin's proclivity for expressing himself through visual arts (though his verbal and math skills are quite

strong, says Prussack), he must also be sure Molly is getting extra academic challenge. In the two and a half years Prussack has been at the school (he is a native New Yorker and, more recently, an urban transplant from Seattle, where he taught at an alternative city middle school) he's had four academically gifted students, and Molly is one of them.

Prussack describes her as a very quick kid with advanced math, verbal, and reasoning skills. He thinks she's one of the few students he's had who might have benefited from a structured gifted and talented program. "I think Molly may feel different sometimes," says Prussack. "If she was in a true gifted program, she might express herself more often. She's aware of how often she knows the answer and limits herself in responding."

NCSA does not have a gifted program partly because of its size and its dedication to differentiated instruction. State guidelines for receiving funds for gifted education also do not encourage the school to pursue a formal program. School director McKeehan says that to receive state funds requires testing and then identification of exactly fifty-one students district-wide. Given that NCSA feels its program is positive for gifted students, the amount of paperwork and other changes necessary for the relatively small amount of money they would receive—about $4,000—is not deemed worthwhile.

Molly's mother, Misha Renclair, agrees with Prussack that classmates do not always match her daughter when it comes to academic work. She says that Molly often carries the load in group projects and is usually the group leader, a role for which other students look to her. At the same time, says Renclair, she'd be hesitant to put the pressure on her daughter that she perceives a gifted program would add. "She's very methodical; she's such a perfectionist," she says of Molly. If the stakes were higher, the girl might be that much more anxious about her performance.

Before coming to NCSA, Molly attended a small private school atop a hill on three hundred acres of land that is located in a community outside Nevada City, near the family's country home. There were just five students in her Kindergarten class. By fourth grade, Molly was underchallenged and by fifth grade she was ready to leave. The transition to NCSA the next year was difficult; it meant a forty-five minute commute and entry into an arts-based curriculum—art is not Molly's strong suit. Molly's sixth grade class had thirty students, which was enormous compared to her previous surroundings. It was a difficult class, with nearly half of her classmates having behavioral problems. Renclair says her daughter was "blown away by how much time was spent on discipline."

Nonetheless, Molly was impressed by the way the teacher was able to gain respect from and ultimately control the seemingly wild group. The woman also took the time to notice Molly's strengths, helping her, Molly says, to "change the way I look at things." Renclair credits the teacher with seeing right away that Molly needed to be told when her work was good enough, or else the girl would push herself needlessly. If you get the first

Quin Graddy,
Gypsy Dancer,
1999

few math problems right on homework , the teacher told Molly, you don't need to continue through other similar problems. Both that teacher and Prussack have worked with Molly and her mother to develop a specific learning plan that fits Molly's needs, allowing her to be challenged and engaged without causing any stomachaches or stress.

Give and Take

As one of the upper-class students at NCSA, Molly is happy with her position and does not claim to feel the isolation that Prussack fears she might. She says that she doesn't stifle herself in class and feels lucky to be accepted by classmates for her "whole self." "At other schools they make fun of you if you're smart," says Molly, "but here I feel accepted. We're all accepted for who we are."

Although art is not one of her passions, Molly credits the arts program with helping her deal with her perfectionist tendencies. Unlike math, her favorite subject, she makes mistakes in artwork and watches while others, like Quin, produce what to her are amazing pieces of work. It's humbling for one of the brightest in class to watch others excel. Her mother adds that the school's arts focus has broadened Molly's horizons, as opposed to being at a math-focused school.

Students like Molly and Quin are hard-pressed to find anything lacking with their school. They clearly relish the small, intimate environment and the proximity to nature (along with the arts, the school stresses environmental, place-based education in its philosophy, reinforced by annual class trips to such destinations as Death Valley and Olympic National Park). But because these students, like many of their classmates, have both spent extensive time away from their remote homes—Quin stills goes to his mother's art studio in San Francisco regularly and has been to many cities and museums around the country; Molly has visited Bali, Japan, and Hawaii—they're aware of the homogeneity of their surroundings. When asked what he dislikes about his community, Quin says, "It's all Anglo." Molly says she'd like to have different-looking people, theaters, museums and "all of the things that come with a city but not the city itself."

And there's the rub. For city folks like Prussack, whose own school years were spent in the middle of New York City, Nevada City is an idyllic escape, a beautiful small town filled with cultured people and a surprising number of diversions for a place of under 3,000 people. The students get extra attention in school and don't face the stressful competition often experienced by top students in urban settings. Yet their peer base is smaller, and one can't hop on a bus, as Prussack recalls doing, to go visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art or attend an orchestra performance.

"Living in a place like this is a matter of give and take," he reflects. "Sure, I'd love to have dim sum in Chinatown, but I've chosen the mountains and the quiet instead." The lure of a self-governed, creative, small school is also a key part of the package.

RESOURCES:

Nevada City School of the Arts
http://www.ncsa.tresd.k12.ca.us/

Twin Ridges Elementary
School District
http://www.tresd.k12.ca.us/
index.html

Education Week's
Charter Schools overview:
http://www.edweek.org/context/
topics/issuespage.cfm?id=42

U.S. Charter Schools
http://www.uscharterschools.org/

VI. A New Kind of Boarding School

Native American Preparatory Academy

Many of the "gifts" traditionally honored by Native cultures are not those honored by the larger American population and have thus been overlooked; they are not fostered by schools nor recognized for admittance into gifted programs.

NAPS is mindful of this history. Gruendler says that the school uses many different definitions of gifted and talented: "We try to broaden the definition so it doesn't have cultural limitations. We really look at the whole student. Would he or she benefit from this environment?"

At a Glance

Native American Preparatory School:
76 students

School District:
not-applicable, NAPS is a private institution

Rowe, NM:
unincorporated, population figures unavailable

Nearest city of 50,000+: Santa Fe, NM (pop. 55,859), a fifty-minute drive

Gifted and Talented program?
School is intended for gifted and talented students.

AP classes?
All classes are college preparatory.

Children in poverty in the school's county, 1995: 37.7%

Persons per square mile, 1999: 6.0

"At night you can see every single strand of the Milky Way. There's not a sound, just the breeze," Amber Boydstun says, describing the campus of the Native American Preparatory School (NAPS). Located on 1,600 acres in the Pecos River Valley, complete with a roaring river and overhanging mesa, the campus feels quite remote despite being just fifty minutes east of Santa Fe. Boydstun, the school's Director of College Placement, describes approaching the school by car: cows often block the road, and the first thing one sees upon entering a tiny enclave of sparse buildings—the village of South San Ysidro—is a gnarled trailer surrounded by barbed wire sculptures, the creations of the man who lives there, dubbed "Barbed Wire Bob" by students.

A person could easily feel like he or she is approaching the ends of the earth, and young students who have never lived away from home might consider this fleetingly. For most NAPS students and faculty, however, the campus sustains and nourishes them with its sublime beauty.

NAPS came into being in the late 1980s as a summer enrichment program for motivated Native American middle school students. Its original home was in Sedona, Arizona, and then on the campus of New Mexico State University. As the founders saw the success they were having both in attracting students and helping them to enroll in college (seventy-five percent of the initial class enrolled in college, a promising statistic for Native American students), they decided to expand.

In September 1995, NAPS opened its doors as a residential, college preparatory high school for gifted and talented Native Americans, located on the grounds of a former corporate retreat center. The school had been the dream child of Richard P. Ettinger, son of the founder of Prentice Hall publishing company. As a student at Dartmouth College in the 1940s, Ettinger had read that educating Native Americans was a part of the school's charter but was disappointed to find none enrolled. Improving Native American education became a lifelong pursuit for Ettinger, who died the year after NAPS opened.

Realities of native education

Today, there are 76 students, representing more than 30 different Native American tribes, in grades nine through twelve at the school. A former headmaster of the school described it as "a Native American United Nations." Christopher Johnson, NAPS Director of Admissions, estimates that nearly 90 percent of the students come from rural areas, including reservations and communities with high Indian populations. Although many Native American students in the United States, at least half, live in urban areas, Johnson says that NAPS recruits students from rural areas because they have fewer academic opportunities than their urban counterparts.

Reservation schools do the best they can with what they have, says Johnson, but their resources are often limited. A 1993-94 Indian education supplement to the annual Schools & Staffing Survey by the National Center for Educational Statistics found that

reservation schools, which are run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in conjunction with local tribes, and schools with at least twenty-five percent Native American or Alaskan Native enrollment, had some of the following characteristics:

- They are primarily located in rural areas and small towns and have enrollments of fewer than 500 students.
- The heaviest concentration of these schools is in the Southwest and Northern Plains regions.
- Eighty-five percent of students in these schools are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches, as opposed to a third of students in schools nationwide.
- Although beginning teachers were better paid in these schools, experienced teachers were not.
- Positions are often difficult to fill, with vacancies more likely filled by inexperienced staff or long-term substitutes.

Although Boydstun says that students come to NAPS primarily for a good education and solid college preparation, many of them have a secondary reason: to find better living conditions and to escape the poverty of reservations. "This is a safe haven for many of them," she says. "Some students come from cities and think, 'My god, this is the middle of nowhere!' but most feel secure here."

As Stuart Tonemah observed in his article "Gifted and Talented American Indian and Alaska Native Students" (1991, ERIC ED343769), gifted Native students face multiple forms of isolation. Like many gifted students, they feel different from classmates because their intellect refuses to conform; they are also different than the mainstream American culture in being from a minority group; and they are often different in terms of socioeconomic standards due to poverty.

From Rosebud to the Ivies

One student who looks back at his reservation school with mixed feelings is Wizipan Garriot, a Lakota Sioux from the Rosebud Reservation, which is centrally located on the southern border of South Dakota, alongside the Nebraska border. Wizipan, who plans to be a tribal lawyer one day, is clear to state that Rosebud is not "in" South Dakota, as reservations are sovereign states.

For his first six years of school, his father, a certified teacher, home schooled Wizipan. When he reached sixth grade, he decided he wanted to be around other kids more frequently and asked to go to the school attended by most of the reservation's children, St. Francis Indian School. His parents worried that the education he'd receive there would be inadequate but yielded to their son's craving for peers. He attended the small school throughout high school, graduating with honors in his class of about thirty classmates.

Although he always made good enough grades, mainly in order to please his parents, Wizipan's memories of high school are of social and athletic activities. He was on the football and basketball teams, and the few kids he knew who went to college did so via athletic scholarships. Mainly, he was not academically challenged. Even the gifted and talented program, which was centered on the school's relatively advanced video recording technology, was uninteresting to him. (Interestingly, the Schools & Staffing supplement reports that reservation schools are more likely to have gifted and talented programs than other schools.) Wizipan saw the program as an opportunity to get out of class but remembers no activities that challenged or compelled him.

As he approached graduation in spring 1998 with a 3.85 grade point average and a list of extracurricular activities and achievements, including National Honors Society membership, his guidance counselor suggested he apply to a junior college—the highest educational institution most local students ever attained.

"I hadn't really thought about college," admits Wizipan. "Just graduating is a big thing on Rosebud. If anyone from Rosebud goes to college, that's an even bigger thing." He notes that only three students from his graduating class are in college today, two years after commencement.

Wizipan's father had loftier goals for his son than junior college, however. He subtly found ways to tempt the boy with other opportunities. Mr. Garriot is involved with "Green Construction" projects around the Rosebud area, having built the family's home from ecologically friendly materials. One of his architect friends provided Wizipan with a list of about nine good architecture schools, a career the young man was considering. Wizi, as his friends call him, didn't recognize any of them and, therefore, didn't apply.

Meanwhile, yet another friend of his father's was close to a prestigious American Studies scholar, Alan Trachtenberg, who had visited Rosebud a few years earlier. The elder Garriot recalled that Trachtenburg had been impressed by Wizipan, saying he was the kind of student who was needed on Trachtenberg's campus. So, Mr. Garriot obtained an application to the school and cajoled his son into applying. Surprising everyone — except perhaps his father — Wizipan's application to Yale University was accepted.

But was it the right place, Wizipan wondered. He thought that Yale and the Ivy Leagues were for "rich, white, preppy kids," an image that didn't change when he traveled to New Haven for Bulldog Days, an open house for potential freshmen. Although the admissions people and the staff and students at the Native American Center were very welcoming, he felt he was getting a cold shoulder from other students. "My whole sense was that people would look down on me, that I didn't belong here, I didn't have the right clothes, I shouldn't come. Proving them wrong became my main motivation. I told myself, 'I may be from the rez. I may be poor. But I can hang with you guys.'"

Still, he had a nagging sense that he wasn't quite ready. One of the deans at Yale told him about NAPS and encouraged him to consider taking a post-graduate year in order to beef up his skills and confidence before coming east. After being accepted to NAPS, Wizipan moved to the campus, far from the Rosebud Reservation, and experienced a temporary jolt of homesickness.

Many kids face a greater culture clash in coming to the New Mexico campus from home than in going to college from NAPS, says Diana Gruendler, the Academic Dean at NAPS. Partly it's the shock of being away from home for the first time, but more so, it's being immersed in a culture of learning.

Wizipan agrees. "The commitment to learning [between St. Francis and NAPS] was night and day. It was the first time I had to really do my homework. And being around other kids who were into school was very different." Although many students are lonely when they first come to NAPS, being around almost all Native students and teachers (the faculty is about fifty percent Native American) eases the feeling. The academic rigor and excitement quickly spur many who have felt isolated or different in their previous schools.

Gruendler says that the NAPS curriculum "incorporates the best of Native education with the best of classical education. It helps kids see the integration between the two so that when they go to college, they feel comfortable in a university setting." When teaching American History, for example, a NAPS teacher will divide the chalkboard with one side headed "American History" and the other "Native Perspective." Wizipan was energized by this approach, feeling he could both learn what other kids, such as his future Yale classmates, were learning in order to hold his own, and also learn to honor his people's history.

I don't think I could live in a big city, but I'm not sure I could live here either. The only reason would be to be near my parents if they needed me. I have a strong tie with the mountain and our property but not to the area.

– Jubal Slone, 12th grade, Gate City, VA

Reconsidering the gifted and talented label

Although NAPS calls itself a school for gifted and talented Native American students in its literature, it's not a term that all staff members endorse. "I don't use the gifted and talented phrase any more," says Johnson, the school's admissions director. "I think all of our kids are gifted and talented, many in ways that aren't measurable."

Traditionally, tribal cultures looked to an array of gifted individuals to lead them, including holy men, peacemakers, warriors, dancers, and orators. As Tonemah writes (1991), "These [leaders] had characteristics that in different ways set them apart from others. For some it may have been the ability to listen and interpret what was said. For others it may have been the ability to plan, to lead, or the ability to heal. These persons and those with the potential to excel in a need area were identified early in their lives, taught and nurtured by parents, mentors and the tribe as a whole. ...they learned by example, learned at their own pace, learned by discovery."

But, notes Tonemah, this system of education has been almost entirely dismantled. In its place is a system tailored for a mass American student body, irrespective of cultural differences. Many of the "gifts" traditionally honored by Native cultures are not those honored by the larger American population and have thus been overlooked; they are not fostered by schools nor recognized for admittance into gifted programs.

NAPS is mindful of this history. Gruendler says that the school uses many different definitions of gifted and talented: "We try to broaden the definition so it doesn't have cultural limitations. We really look at the whole student. Would he or she benefit from this environment?"

Many students simply haven't had sufficient academic training from their home schools to excel on standardized tests. Math, for example, is an area in which many students, including Wizipan, have large gaps in understanding. One student came to NAPS with a transcript showing he'd passed algebra, but it turned out that the algebra teacher had been absent the entire year and all the students had been passed. On the other hand, some kids come to NAPS with outstanding skills and scores. Gruendler says that one NAPS student, the bulk of whose education was at a reservation school, earned a perfect score of 800 on the math section of the SAT-I. "By the same token," she says, "I want to make certain that if a student doesn't score well, we don't discount him or her."

The school has avoided tracking and other systems that might give students a sense of being better or smarter than others. When they finally decided to offer AP Calculus—a decision the staff came to because students were so polarized in math, with some bored and others struggling—in addition to the usual math classes to which students are assigned by grade, students were allowed to self-select rather than enter a class based on scores, grades, or teacher recommendations. Boydstun, who was a member of the math department at the time, said that some students chose differently for themselves than their teachers would have, but overall the process seemed better than assigned tracking.

Learning styles are popular at NAPS. Wizipan says that when he thinks of "giftedness," Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences comes to mind. "From a Native perspective," he says, "spirituality plays a role in learning, in being gifted. There are some kids who are connected to the other world, but in the public high school system they're called dumb, or troublemakers. Yet they're seeing the world in a completely different way that we can't even fathom. Given the right training and environment, they would flourish."

Boydstun also feels it's crucial to recognize students whose gifts are not the usual academic ones recognized by many schools. "There are certainly some students here who struggle with academics and wouldn't be considered 'gifted and talented' at many schools; yet I consider them to be among the most gifted because they have perspective and insight that I consider to be invaluable."

Life after NAPS

When students leave NAPS they have another set of obstacles to overcome. Although they've gotten used to doing their own laundry and working hard in an academically rigorous atmosphere, they've also been surrounded by other Native students in a quiet, rural setting. In some instances, such as Wizipan's experience at Yale in urban New Haven, Connecticut, they're entering unfamiliar city landscapes. And in nearly all cases, they head to college campuses that are predominantly white. NAPS students are aware of being part of two cultures, both a mainstream, academic culture and a Native culture. In discussions with classmates, faculty and staff at NAPS, they prepare for life outside the school.

In her college application essay, senior Deina Barton, who came to NAPS from the Window Rock Reservation, the capital of the Navajo Nation, acknowledges the challenges of living in two cultures and trying to succeed in both: "Being Indian and American has me caught in two worlds. The two parts of me have interconnected and have taught me about both ways of life. I know I must never forget my culture and the traditions of my Navajo and Zuni tribes. Without my Native identity, I am lost. Yet, I know if I want to survive in this world, I must obtain a respectable education while not losing my Indian ways. I want to prove that I can get an excellent education and still keep my traditional values close by.

"I want both sides of me to experience life in college. My Indian side will need to be in an environment where I can have respect and space for my personal views. My American side will need a college that will help me nurture my intelligence but also help me grow. Both sides will need a college that will not only educate me, but help me realize where my Indian side stands in this foreign world. I want a college that will help me prosper as a whole being, intertwining my two cultures."

In some ways, although NAPS is a Native environment, it is still a different culture than most students experience on the reservation, steeped as it is in the culture of learning. College is the next step—learning but in the white world. The shock of entering that world has much to do with the low number of Native students who remain in college.

After two years at Yale, Wizipan says that he still experiences culture shock every time he goes back to the Rosebud Reservation. The feeling hits him again when he returns to New Haven. "You go back [to the reservation] and all you see are brown people; here it's all white people," he comments by phone from his dorm room. He works hard to maintain his connections with friends and family on the reservation, making sure he can still talk with old friends about basketball and other topics. His younger sister chose to be home schooled through eighth grade and then went to NAPS; she doesn't have the same ties to home, something he finds regrettable.

And yet he can't help feeling awkward about the privileges he's gained via his elite education. "I'm not smart," he says, "I just do the work. I know kids on the rez who are naturally smarter, who have a better IQ. If they'd had the same experiences as me and took advantage of them, they could be in the same place or better. But due to circumstances, they don't." Sometimes, says Wizipan, he can't help but wonder why he deserves to be at Yale: "It tears me up." His best friend at Rosebud has two kids, is separated from his wife, and "smokes weed all day."

At the end of his freshman year at Yale, Wizipan changed his career goal from architecture to law. He'd like to go home one day and work as a tribal lawyer. Part of his decision came from the fact that he couldn't work on the reservation if he stuck with architecture because people there usually don't have the money to hire architects. Perhaps his becoming a lawyer and helping his people get what is rightly theirs, including access to land, will help another young person in his position follow his or her initial dream.

Overcoming the past

Wizipan has given much thought to Native education and what's necessary to improve it. In trying to pinpoint the deficiencies of reservation schools, he cites the lack of resources as a major problem. He does not necessarily mean lack of material resources—his school was a newer building that was well-equipped—but lack of community resources, which are incredibly low on the reservation, more similar to a third world country than to most American communities.

"If you compound the problems of public education in general with a people who are oppressed, it's a disaster," he says. "There's eighty-five percent unemployment on Rosebud. Everything that describes a third world country describes Rosebud. These aren't conditions that make people care about school; they are conditions that create a sense hopelessness."

Another barrier to improving Indian education are boarding schools—not NAPS or other contemporary programs, but the ghosts of turn-of-the-century schools that were established to assimilate Indian children by ridding them of their culture. Taken from their homes, students were forced to use only English and encouraged to forget their Native languages; their braids were cut and their traditional clothing replaced with the petticoats and suits of the day. Captain Richard Pratt, the founder of one such school, said his goal was to "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."

The schools achieved their goals, playing havoc with cultural traditions that had already been uprooted and badly disrupted when tribes were forced from their original lands onto reservations. The children sent to the boarding schools lost their familial bonds; they didn't learn how to parent; they forgot customs and basic tribal patterns.

Wizipan believes that the alcoholism and abuse that are prevalent among Native American communities today can be directly linked to this unlearning of traditions. Ironically, he believes that programs like NAPS are part of the solution. By temporarily removing young people from some of the chaos and hopelessness of reservations, NAPS teaches them new ways of being, and then allows them to return as healthier people.

Christopher Johnson notes that one of the main battles the school has in attracting students is overcoming the negative perceptions many Natives have of boarding schools. There is also a strong cultural tradition of staying home and helping the family, especially for young women, that students must fight against when electing to go not only to NAPS but also to college. Families wonder where this education will eventually carry their young people, sometimes worrying that it will be far from them.

Honoring traditions

With her freckles and clearly Anglo appearance, Amber Boydstun is in the racial minority on the NAPS campus, an experience she's found instructive. She came to NAPS as a math and theater teacher and is now the Director of College Placement, after having grown up in Boulder, Colorado, and "middle-of-nowhere" Wyoming. She's taught high school in a variety of settings and tutored kids from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The kids at NAPS are different, she believes. "It's hard for me to pinpoint," she says, "But there's a very special quality of character here."

She is astounded and humbled by both the poverty and depth of culture from which many of her students come. She describes attending feasts at a nearby Pueblo reservation, the home to several NAPS students. "You go there and you definitely have the sense that this was the land not fit for the white man. The land no one

YEARS OF GROWTH AND CHANGE

By Madonna Analla, NAPS class of 2001

Riding down the dusty dirt road through the tiny town of South San Yisidro, I still couldn't believe what was happening. The Native American Prep School was to be home for the next four years of my life. I had only been there once. The place was beautiful. The scenery, the rooms and the people were all too good to be true.

After registering, part of me felt scared and ready to leave. The other part of me was ready to let my parents go. I remember everyone was crying and saying their good-byes. I was one of the few who didn't cry that day. I didn't see the point; I was going to see my parents again.

That was three years ago. I still remember it like it happened yesterday. But through the years, a lot has changed. The school has changed, the people have changed, and I have changed. The whole NAPS experience has helped me appreciate things a lot more. I find myself wanting to help other people when I used to say "everyone helps themselves." I find myself wanting to go on to college and succeed when I used to say, "I'll get there if I get there."

NAPS is not an easy place to be. It's a small and secluded place and I'm away from family and friends. But as time passes, new friends are made and the whole community becomes one big family. NAPS has become my home and the friends I have made here are my family. My experience has been the best time of my life and I wouldn't trade it for anything. Coming to NAPS was the best decision I have ever made.

else wanted. It's a desolate, dustbowl place. There are narrow streets, but they're not paved—just a big, uneven grid. The houses look like small garages slapped together. But they take pride in trying to make it nice, despite the lack of resources. I went to one student's house and there was a large living room, a kitchen, one bedroom, and a back porch. The parents, two grandmothers, about four kids, and some random cousins who came and went all lived there. I have no idea where they all slept."

Student Deina Barton echoes this sentiment when describing Window Rock, the Navajo reservation she calls home. When asked what the town is like she laughs and says there isn't really a town, not in the sense of a Main Street and a grid of houses and shops. "There's a few gas stations and a store, and then the houses are scattered around. There aren't any street names. When my mom needed to get something from UPS, she had to call the county to find out the name of our street."

Boydstun describes attending a feast as a unique experience in trust and hospitality unlike anything she'd experienced before. Having become lost and separated from the rest of the school group, she and another teacher stopped at a house to ask directions. The woman who answered was older and didn't seem to speak English. Before they could communicate anything to her, she'd pulled them in, sat them down at the table, and begun to serve them food.

"It didn't matter that the people in the house didn't know us; we were guests," recalls Boydstun. "We ate and ate, and more students came and other people. Probably forty people passed through this tiny dining room before the kids showed up who lived there and whom we turned out to know. That never would have happened where I came from, and despite the level of living conditions, it was really wonderful. There's something there that's missing from white culture."

Students at NAPS honor this cultural heritage not only by learning about their history and studying Native literature in academic classes. There are also many opportunities for students to share their unique tribal heritage with classmates by performing dances and songs, writing poetry, or painting memories of their homeland. Graduation is one of the most festive events, with students wearing tribal clothing of every hue and decorated with necklaces, leather wares, feathers and other ornaments they've either made or brought from home. Without the ubiquity of matching polyester gowns, the seniors are a festive group, each celebrating his or her individuality, but doing so as a group, like colorful birds flocked together, ready to soar to new heights.

RESOURCES:

Native American Preparatory School
http://www.naprep.org/

VII. Finding Support: A Teacher Discovers a Network

Idalia High School, Colorado

as a veteran teacher, she is well aware of the perils of losing one's creative energy and vitality, but does what she can to overcome this. This year, via Breadnet listserv, for example, she volunteered to co-mentor a young teacher located in a rural area who is teaching AP for the first time and has enjoyed their online dialogue. Having taught in many different-sized communities, Rossbach knows that rural teachers may face the most hardships of teachers in any locale. Urban and suburban peers usually have at least a handful of colleagues with whom to plan or console, she observes.

At a Glance

Idalia High School: 175 students

East Yuma County RJ-2 School District: 1006 students (note: as of the 2001-02 school year, Idalia schools will form their own district following a vote to de-consolidate from schools in neighboring Wray, Colorado

Idalia, CO: pop. 90

Nearest city of 50,000+: Denver, CO (pop. 470,000) about an hour and a half drive

Gifted and Talented program? Individualized programming for K-8 students, advanced coursework for 9-12 students

AP Classes offered at high school? Yes

Children below poverty in the school's county, 1995: 14.3%

Persons per square mile, 1999: 4

Idalia, Colorado, is far from the splendor of the Rocky Mountains and the glitz of Colorado's well-known ski resorts. Perched on the Kansas border, the town is a small dot on the map, halfway between larger Wray (pop. 1,998) and Burlington (pop. 2,941) on Highway 385. When asked where she lives, one Idalia High School student replies, "In the middle of nowhere."

Only about ninety people live in Idalia proper. The majority of the high school's one hundred and seventy-five students commute from surrounding farms, where they help their families to grow corn, wheat, and sunflowers. There are also some hog lots in the area, which have brought a small, but steadily increasing Hispanic community.

For years, Idalia has been part of the East Yuma County School District, along with neighboring Wray. It was a consolidation borne out of fiscal necessity, but the smaller town has always been viewed as a poor cousin, a potential drain on already-limited resources. It seemed that Idalia kids tended to get textbooks and other materials after the kids in Wray got what they needed. When a new track was built, it was located in Wray, while Idalia students looked on empty-handed. So when the state legislature recently made more money available for smaller schools, people in Idalia began re-thinking the consolidation.

In November 2000, while the rest of the country was haggling over two of the presidential candidates, Bush and Gore, voters from both Idalia and Wray agreed to de-consolidate their schools. In the early twentieth century, the consolidation trend boomed. As an economic necessity, consolidation continued into the twenty-first century since small, rural districts remain pressed by dwindling enrollments and lackluster funding. Once districts are united, it's hard to separate them. De-consolidating is quite rare; some in Idalia think they be one of the only districts in the country to make such a move. But it's a decision that has pleased all involved.

Limited opportunities for gifted students

In a small school in a place that doesn't even appear on some maps (such as an online U.S. Census map), one teacher has provided a unique outlet for her students. Lucille Rossbach has taught at Idalia High School for ten years as an English teacher. When asked to describe her department, she laughs kindly, "I am the English department!" Rossbach teaches the only two Advanced Placement courses in the school, English Literature and Composition as well as English Language and Composition, and has been an avid supporter of those students who she sees as having high academic potential.

Idalia schools do have a gifted policy, although Rossbach describes it as "relatively liberal," with students identified on the basis of test scores, grades, and/or teacher recommendations. Seniors have the option of taking several humanities-related community college classes at the high school (the closest community college is about 60 miles away), four of which are taught by Rossbach. For younger students in the district, gifted programming is individualized. For example, three identified eighth graders have recently worked on their own accelerated curriculum.

Rossbach says that the services available for these students have improved largely because of changes in state funding. About five years ago, the state made funds available for gifted education, with the caveat that schools demonstrate how they use the money. This has forced educators to be more aware of the needs of gifted students, she says, resulting in trips to museums in Denver and surrounding historical sites, as well as increased individualized attention.

Like many rural teachers, Rossbach and her colleagues have little opportunity for training in issues and methods related to gifted and talented students. Occasional workshops are available at area-wide in-services, but mainly teachers must seek out such specialized training.

Teacher finds unique support system

Unlike some teachers who work in schools as geographically isolated as Idalia, Rossbach has a unique core of colleagues with whom to discuss such frustrations as what she calls the "gutting of the English curriculum." Rossbach is a member of the Bread Loaf Rural Teachers' Network, a program that includes summer classes, conferences, and communication between teachers and their students throughout the academic year via a listserv. Rossbach became a Bread Loaf teacher two years ago after her school was awarded an Annenberg Rural Challenge grant. Someone from the Annenberg Foundation suggested she apply to be a Bread Loaf Fellow; she applied and spent her first summer studying with other rural and small town teachers on the Middlebury College campus in Vermont (Bread Loaf School of English is part of the college). During the summer of 2000, she was accepted to the Bread Loaf program in Oxford, England, where she delved into 17th century poetry.

Rossbach says that Bread Loaf has provided her a support system, something she sorely needed as the only high school English teacher in a 30-mile radius. "We do a lot of cheerleading for each other," she says of her nationwide colleagues, "which is something teachers desperately need in these days of standards—and even more so in isolated, rural areas."

> The superintendent has two kids in the gifted and talented program, and one of our principals has a daughter in the program. So they are very supportive of it. But the faculty is a different story. Some faculty members are intimidated by gifted kids. They don't see why special services are necessary, or they resent not being able to teach those children. Gifted children have special needs, and the higher their ability, the more emotional problems they have. Many faculty members don't understand this.
>
> – Jane Sly, teacher and gifted program coordinator, Cochran, GA

Her students have also been beneficiaries of Rossbach's association with Bread Loaf by participating in online exchanges with students in other parts of the country. Rossbach's classes have an ongoing poetry exchange with teacher Tammy Van Whye's students in Kenny Lake, Alaska. Once a week, students write to an online partner to discuss a common poem. They also send each other original poetry for feedback, and then share their poetry again with Chris Benson, a Bread Loaf director and a professor at Clemson University. He provides the students with feedback, as well as the pride of conversing with a university professor.

Other exchanges occur between students in her reading class and kids from Joseph City High School on a Navajo reservation in Arizona. Several of her at-risk students, all of whom had failed English previously, correspond with students in Ketchikan, Alaska. One of them, a boy who last year could write only a few lines at a time, with no punctuation or capitalization, is now composing full pages with much more attention to details, and just finished reading his first entire book, all because of his need and desire to correspond with his online partner.

Because of the exchanges, Rossbach sees her academically able students being challenged by a higher level of discussion than she's witnessed before. A recent series of online communications between seniors studying Shakespeare's MacBeth and several teachers in Georgia and Alaska (Bread Loaf has an Alaska campus, thus the large number of participants there) resulted in an especially academic, erudite conversation. Another bonus of the electronic exchanges has been the exposure her students receive to other parts of the country, and especially in the case of the Navajo exchange, to other cultures. The isolation of small, rural places can make kids very fearful of differences, she says, so this helps to break down some barriers.

Writing provides opportunities for students to shine

Along with her participation in Bread Loaf, the Annenberg Rural Challenge grant allowed Rossbach to attend a workshop at the Foxfire Center in Georgia. Since her first days as a teacher, thirty-five years ago, she has been aware of Foxfire and has read their books. When the Idalia community was discussing how to spend their grant money, she went to her classroom to retrieve some of the Foxfire books and shared examples of literary journals students had made that featured the lore of local people. Everyone was enthused by the idea and supported Rossbach to explore a similar project in Idalia.

GUSTS OF DUST: FROM IDEA TO REALITY

In her Introduction to Gusts of Dust, *a book of student writing about community history based on the Foxfire approach, teacher Lucille Rossbach describes the process of pulling together a large and complex student-centered project for the first time.*

Two years ago our school received a grant from the Annenberg Rural Challenge primarily to help rural schools and students achieve a "sense of place" and to do "real, self-sustaining" projects. Our local Rural Challenge Committee administers the grant and approved funds for me to participate in a Foxfire training in Mountain City, Georgia.

That Foxfire course did not give me a how-to manual for having students publish a book; instead, I received research-based affirmation for some philosophies I was already practicing. Some schools have tried to have classes publish books but abandoned the projects. Why? It may be the philosophy that makes the difference.

Foxfire's eleven Core Practices grew out of teachers' experiences of "what works in the classroom." Then, surprisingly, all eleven practices were found to be grounded in John Dewey's philosophy. So actually, this non-traditional approach to learning has been propounded for decades by Dewey and used for generations of teachers.

Prior to going to Mountain City, I needed approval from our board of education to teach a writing lab at my school. I drafted standards for the class that include the Colorado Department of Education's standards for reading and writing and also their school-to-career standards. Those standards were adopted as the East Yuma County RJ-2 District Standards for the Idalia High School Writing Lab.

With the district standards on one sheet of paper and the eleven Foxfire Core Practices on another, I started the school year without a syllabus. I was nervous. I always use a syllabus which I give to the students at the start of each school year. It guides everything we do and it gives me direction for what I believe students should learn. But this year I only gave the students in the Writing Lab a copy of the standards. I told them I was nervous and the reason why. Then I told them, "This is all I have, the one sheet of paper. You guys have to decide how you're going to learn it, what you are going to do in class to learn it, and how you want to be graded. The mandate is that you have to write." Then I told them about the Foxfire course I had taken and gave them a copy of the Foxfire Core Practices to help guide our decisions.

They seemed both excited and apprehensive about the responsibility they had just received. I assured them that I would help facilitate whatever we chose to do. Many ideas were brainstormed, but the greatest concern seemed to be "if we do that, how are we going to grade it?" Finally, I suggested that they shouldn't be so concerned with grading. "Let's decide what we really want to do, and then let's decide how to grade our progress."

Continued on next page

The students initially envisioned a National Geographic-style publication, but we had no money for such a publication. Almost miraculously, grant proposals were passed on to us by our principal. Using the standards for the class, the students wrote grants. We first discussed what needed to be in a grant, how to justify what they were asking for, and how to tie their requests to the standards. In teams, they wrote three grants. Later I completed two more using their ideas. We received money from all five applications!

We bought tape recorders to record interviews, ear phones and foot pedals to facilitate transcribing, some small word processors to accommodate our lack of access to computers, and a camera. But the real work had already begun.

Each student in the Lab had chosen a topic he or she felt passionately about and started the research. Most information came from interviews with community members; but some was quoted from out-of-print local histories and from Internet sources. Now the classroom became very quiet as students either went off to interview someone or transcribed their taped interview into the word processors.

Then one day Dennis Schiel, a professional artist who also has a small publishing business in Idalia, dropped in by invitation to give us a publishing bid. Immediately, our excitement accelerated. He helped us realize that we could actually write a book, with an ISBN number even, rather than just a magazine. That was a genuine "Whoopie," a reason to celebrate.

The first semester gave this class many "Whoopies." Students' opinions were valued as they chose what to do. They voluntarily came to school on a Saturday morning to do a group interview with community members, and it worked: one person's memories spurred another's memories. What we were doing generated lots of excitement in our community; at times, we weren't sure of the reason. We were even featured with a full-page spread in the Winter 1999 issue of Foxfire News, their national newsletter.

We also had "oopsies." Anything tried for the first time will rarely go smoothly. The students' first real "Oopsie" was the poorly-edited final drafts they turned in – although generally they were well written. Some students, for the first time, realized the real difference between writing and editing. They are mostly sophomores in high school, beginning writers at best. Most took the class not because they were "good" writers, but because they wanted to improve their writing. They learned that careful editing is an important last step in the writing process.

My personal "Oopsie" was that I resorted back to my traditional method of teacher-led work for about three weeks before all our copy went to the publisher. So often we teachers fall back to what we felt comfortable doing in the past. And almost always the reason is because we get into a time crunch. The authoritarian approach always works fastest, although the students often give up responsibility when they have little voice in the process. But I absolutely believe we need to allow ourselves permission to retreat, as long as we are determined to not stay there.

A personal "Whoopie" for me was the dedication of most of the students in the class. I am button-popping proud of them! For those several weeks before the book went to the publisher, we felt rushed. Taking off four weeks to write grants earlier forced a late start on the research. So now we spent hours laboriously rewriting and editing articles. This no longer was fun! This was hard work! But they did not abandon the task. Students "voluntarily" rewrote and edited again and again to present the best copy they could produce. Their intense desire to write well and to produce a book of quality drove them to keep working, many times late into the night in order to meet our publisher's deadline.

Now that the writing phase is over, we look at what we've done. Ten thousand dollars for one class of only ten students to write on outdated topics? Why would the world want to read this? It does seem ludicrous, but here it is. It has involved many hours of hard research, difficulty with writing, and tedious editing. But it also involved innumerable hours of pleasure in visiting with community members and hearing their stories. What started as an infant dream has given birth to a reality. Voices rise out of the past for a rebirth of their stories through our new generation of students. It is a new dawn: a student-run class and a book written by non-professionals.

– *Lucille Rossbach*
Introduction to Gusts of Dust, Volume I

Note: The Writing Lab students who produced *Gusts of Dust, Volume I* were awarded a "Students Making a Difference" award by the Colorado Department of Education for successfully completing the requirements of the Goals 2000 Grant; the Foxfire Fund awarded the class their prestigious "Exemplary Classroom Award," one of only five given nationally that year; and the book has been favorably reviewed on amazon.com. In addition, community support in Idalia for the project is overwhelming, with people frequently writing letters to the class or calling to offer information about possible stories or to volunteer some historical memorabilia.

Since then, two volumes of Gusts of Dust have been published, in which students have collected stories, photos, and other memorabilia from older community members, sculpting the accounts into well-written essays. The journals have been incredibly well received, winning Rossbach and her students several awards, as well as impressive grant funds. Rossbach is most excited by the way in which the books have sprung from the students themselves; the students set goals for their learning, decided their writing topics, and were responsible for the organization of the entire process.

Another project, borne partly of the poetry exchange program and of the student-centered approach Rossbach learned more about during her Foxfire workshop, was a book of student poetry. One of Rossbach's students, Jesseca Shively, volunteered to edit the book, which she and her co-authors titled *Lifeways*. The sophomore coordinated the project, collecting her classmates' work on disc, revising and proofreading their poetry, and preparing the book for press. Eventually, it was sent to an outside printer and bound into an attractive blue volume. Shively said it was a much bigger project than she'd anticipated but was well worth it for the experience. Rossbach was continuously impressed by the dedication and care the girl took with the book.

Like many Idalia students, Shively lives on a farm about sixteen miles from school. Her parents are both from the area—her dad raises cattle and farms corn, wheat, and sunflowers—and Shively's idea of a night on the town is to go to nearby Burlington with her friends where there is a one-screen movie theater and a bowling alley. Still, she's seen more of the world than most of her friends or many young people who live in more urbane locales. As a member of a youth missionary group, she traveled to both Uganda and Ukraine, where she visited local schools and helped with construction projects.

RANCH

By Ray Wudtke,
Idalia High School

Cows mournfully low;
the dogs yup, the horses neigh,
Dust on the breeze blows.

AUTUMN

By Daniel Morris,
Idalia High School

I sit. I hear the sounds of cars.
I look. I see the 156-foot Co-op.
I smell the grain dust from
the trucks unloading.
I feel the warm breeze from
the wind.

Small Size brings pros and cons

With twenty-four students, Shively's class has nearly ten more students than the average class at Idalia High School. She knows everyone, of course, which she says can be both good and bad: "On one hand you know everyone and feel comfortable, but then the people you don't like really drive you nuts and you can't get away from them!"

While she's not worried about running out of classes to take—she's currently enrolled in one of Rossbach's AP English classes and a college-level speech class—Shively

does think that the lack of course choices is one of the drawbacks of a small school. The amount of personalized attention she receives from teachers, something she can't imagine happening in a larger school, is the payoff.

Rossbach agrees with this assessment. Math and science opportunities are especially lacking since the few community college-level classes available are all in English or art. But the school's diminutive size garners a level of trust and freedom that Rossbach, who taught in the Denver area for about six years, knows is special. When students need to get online to talk to their literature partners in Alaska or Arizona, for example, Rossbach can let them go to any open computer around the school, including a series of machines in an adjacent building. She then moves from room to room, feeling confident that the kids are on-task and safe.

THE GOOD OL' DAYS

By Darla Richards & Tara Lengel, from Gusts of Dust, Volume I

Can you imagine taking turns riding to school on the family pony? Or going to school regardless of the weather? Maybe helping your father hook up a team of horses and plowing through the snow to get to school? Our grandparents did. Usually while Edgar tied up the horse, his sister Ruth carried their lunches into the wooden, one-room school house.

They always looked forward to a normal school day that started at 8:00 a.m. and ended at 4:00 p.m., with recesses at 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Some popular games played at recess were Fox and Geese, similar to Duck, Duck, Goose; Anne on Over; Steal Stones, similar to Capture the Flat; Pump, Pump, Pull Away; and baseball.

Also, the teaching style differed from today. To manage time wisely, the first grade students did their lessons first in the morning, followed by second grade reading and math, and so on through the eight grades. Alms Helling, one of the ladies that taught our grandparents, still lives in Idalia.

The Newton School, also known as the Lengel School, was located on Highway 385 and County Road 2. It was established around 1915. Our great-grandfather, Joe Lengel, attended the first Newton School that was made of sod. Later, in 1939, the first wooden school was torn down to accommodate all the students. The new school, still only one room, held approximately sixteen students who attended annually.

Named after the post office and store, the school closed down in 1945 when the new Newton School consolidated with many others to form a school for the ninth through twelfth grades. (Until recently, that building was located west of the present Idalia High School. Two years ago, it was auctioned off to someone outside of the community.)

Our grandparents, Edgar Lengel and Ruth Richards, attended the Newton School from first through eighth grade. They remember being in school when the massive clouds of dust would roll in between 1933 and 1935. "It was blacker than the ace of spades," Edgar said. On those days, the teacher would let school out early, and the children's parents would come to get them.

For entertainment, all the families would get together at the school. The children would put on a program for their parents, which was followed by a box supper. The ladies decorated boxes, put food in them, and then auctioned them. The evening usually ended with a dance or a game of cards.

Our grandparents have lived here their whole lives, and they have been through many changes. Of all the changes, they think the school has changed the most. After all, no one sings this anymore: "School days, school days, dear ol' Golden Rule days. Readin' and writin' and 'rithmetic taught to the tune of a hickory stick..."

DECONSOLIDATION PLAN PASSES IN COLORADO SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Voters in Colorado's East Yuma County school district voted to deconsolidate their district into two districts. Under the approved plan, the territory, assets, and tax base of the current district will be divided into two districts that will hold separate school board elections in March. The new boards will then work as nonvoting members of the existing single district board for four months before formally taking over the reins of their separate districts.

The current district has two K-12 schools: a tiny one in Idalia and a march larger one in Wray 29 miles away. Though this is formally a case of one district breaking into two districts, it is largely perceived as tiny Idalia seeking its own chance to govern its small school, separate from much larger Wray. The Idalia school is a member of a consortium of schools called Stewards of the High Plains, an affiliated partner of the Rural School and Community Trust. The plan passed by a wide margin. A similar deconsolidation vote also passed by a wide margin in the adjacent West Yuma County school district.

In Idalia, a deconsolidation community education committee has been meeting to discuss what kind of educational plan they hope the new school adopts. Although it has no legal authority in this process, the committee is trying to organize a consensus about how to create the kind of school the community really wants. Some prefer to take things a step at a time, completing the separation before considering new educational approaches. Others think the time will never be better to start out right.

It's not all a bed of roses, reports Betty Moellenberg, the project director for Stewards of the High Plains. "We have some hard times ahead. As a community we aren't used to constructive conflict. Having Wray to blame and deflect anger, we never learned give and take. I predict we will learn some conflict resolution skills that should have been learned long ago."

Democracy takes work, no doubt. Having small schools governed close to home is no panacea to the problems of modern education. People have to know how to make their peace with one another and find the common ground. Idalia is not only taking a chance on itself, but on democracy as well.

Reprinted from *Rural Policy Matters*. See http://www.ruraledu.org for more information.

RESOURCES:

The Bread Loaf School of English
http://www.breadnet.middlebury.edu/

Foxfire
http://www.foxfire.org/

Stewards of the High Plains
http://www.ruraledu.org/projects.html#
olorado

Although some gifted students like Shively flourish in the small environment, Rossbach suspects that others are unmotivated and "check out." One of her current seniors strikes her as extremely intelligent, yet he has poor work habits and is not viewed positively by many teachers because he's not an "A" student. "I don't think we're meeting his needs," she says. Without a peer base and the right classes and opportunities to catch their imaginations, students like this can easily fall through the cracks.

The same could be said of teachers. Without ongoing training and the support of like-minded peers, it's easy to become frustrated. Rossbach says she often lacks a colleague-ally on her faculty, and as the only English teacher, she certainly doesn't have anyone just down the hall with whom she can bounce around new ideas.

As a veteran teacher, she is well aware of the perils of losing one's creative energy and vitality, but does what she can to overcome this. This year, via Breadnet listserv, for example, she volunteered to co-mentor a younger teacher located in a rural area who is teaching AP for the first time and has enjoyed their online dialogue. Having taught in many different-sized communities, Rossbach knows that rural teachers may face the most hardships of teachers in any locale. Urban and suburban peers usually have at least a handful of colleagues with whom to plan or console, she observes.

"Rural and small town teachers are especially prone to feelings of isolation, even depression," Rossbach says. They have a sense of always facing obstacles alone. "But when you learn there's a host of teachers nationwide experiencing similar things, it gives you a base. Then, after something you've worked hard at is rejected by the administration or doesn't go well, you can get online and cry over the airwaves." She smiles at this notion and one can imagine the depth of humor and faith it took to pull off some of the projects Rossbach has accomplished despite being in—as her student called it—the middle of nowhere.

End Note

Listening to these voices, it is clear that there are energetic and creative teachers and administrators doing exciting things on behalf of gifted students. This report underscores the point that we have remarkable educators in our rural schools.

Listening to these voices, we also hear clearly the message that there are remarkable students in rural schools. These voices are from students who are driven to excellence and who are ready for challenges beyond the "typical" curriculum.

We have focused on voices of success. The students and educators who were courageous in meeting the challenge of individuality and excellence are the voices of success. These challenges were met in the context of respect and preservation for the concept of "rural" both as geography and culture. It is our commitment, through the Wallace Family Conferences and these biennial reports, to advocate for education appropriate for gifted students within the rich environment of rural schools.

Appendices

A. Rural Data Interpretation
B. Iowa Timeline of Education
C. Iowa School Data
D. Programs of the Belin-Blank Center

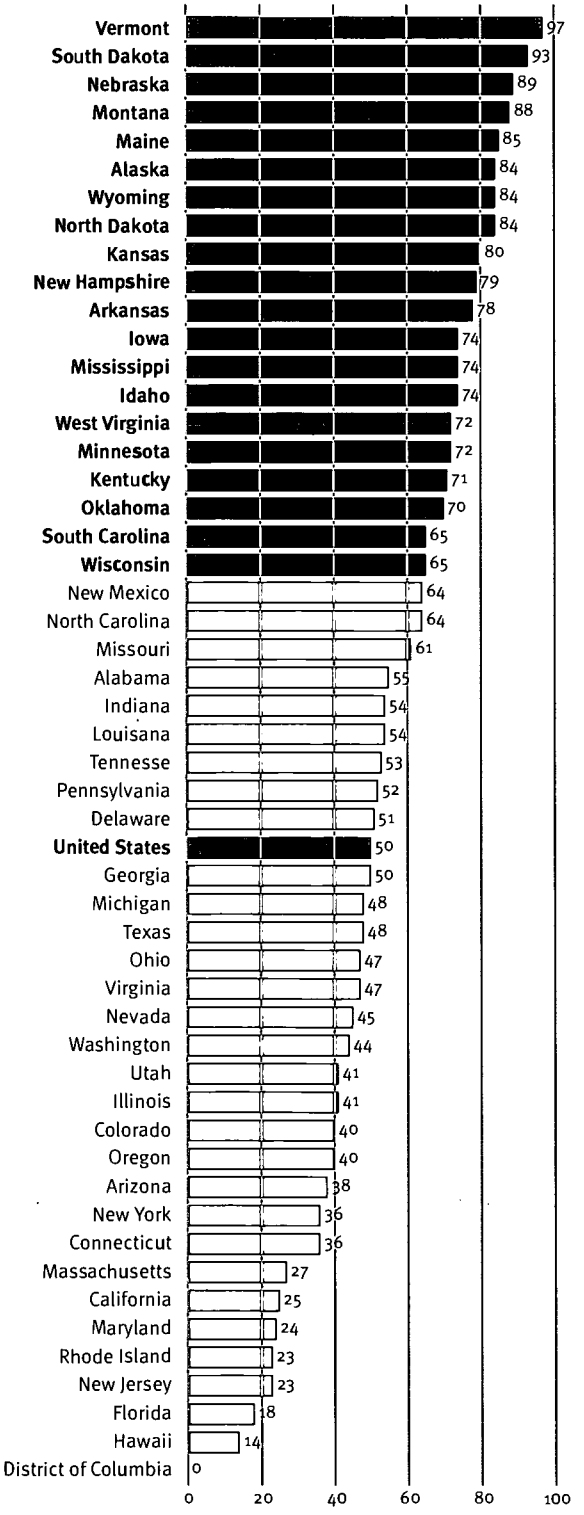
Appendix A.

Rural Data Interpretation

We relied upon several statistical publications to generate the following tables. The purpose in presenting this information is to provide a demographic, statistical, and economic "picture" of rural America. All of the data reported in the following tables are for public schools. The top-20 rural schools are in bold on each table.

Table 1

Percentage of Public Schools in small Town/Rural Areas by State: 1993-94

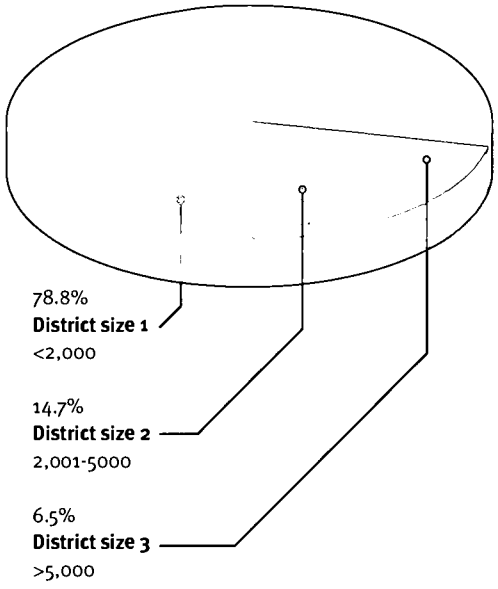


States in bold represent the 20 states on which we focused our statistical interpretation.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993-94 (Public School Questionnaire)

The next Schools and Staffing Survey will be available in May 2001.

Figure 1
Percentage of school districts by size categories.



As demonstrated in Table 1, 50% of all public schools in the United States are in small towns/rural areas. There are approximately 87,000 American public schools of which 43,500 are in small towns/rural areas. Thirty-nine percent of all public school students are in small towns/rural areas. This amounts to about 17.5 million students living in small towns/rural area.

What are the sizes of the districts in small towns/rural areas? Within the sub-group of the top-20 rural states, small districts (fewer than 2,000 students) represent 78.8% of the total number of districts; medium-sized districts (2001 to 5000 students) represent 14.7 % of the total number of districts; and large districts (more than 5000 students) represent 6.5% of the total number of districts. Although the percentages of the total number of districts are dramatically different, the actual number of students in each of these size categories is approximately the same.

Table 2
Percentage of public school students by race or ethnicity

State or other area	Percentage distribution by state (1993-94)	Percentage distribution by race or ethnicity: fall 1997				
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian or Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaskan Native
United States	**63.5**	**17.0**	**14.4**	**3.9**	**1.2**
Alabama	61.7	36.0	0.8	0.7	0.8
Alaska	**62.8**	**4.7**	**3.0**	**4.8**	**24.8**
Arizona	56.0	4.4	30.8	1.8	7.0
Arkansas	**73.1**	**23.5**	**2.2**	**0.8**	**0.4**
California	38.8	8.8	40.5	11.1	0.9
Colorado	71.3	5.6	19.3	2.7	1.1
Connecticut	71.5	13.7	12.1	2.5	0.2
Delaware	63.2	30.1	4.6	1.9	0.2
District of Columbia	4.0	87.0	7.5	1.5	—
Florida	56.2	25.4	16.4	1.8	0.2
Georgia	57.1	38.0	2.9	1.9	0.1
Hawaii	21.6	2.6	4.7	70.7	0.4
Idaho	**87.6**	**0.7**	**9.2**	**1.2**	**1.3**
Illinois	62.0	21.3	13.4	3.1	0.2
Indiana	85.1	11.3	2.6	0.8	0.2
Iowa	**91.8**	**3.6**	**2.6**	**1.6**	**0.5**
Kansas	**81.3**	**8.6**	**7.0**	**2.0**	**1.1**
Kentucky	**88.6**	**10.3**	**0.5**	**0.5**	**0.1**
Louisiana	50.2	46.7	1.2	1.3	0.6
Maine	**97.1**	**0.9**	**0.5**	**0.9**	**0.6**
Maryland	55.9	36.1	3.7	4.0	0.3
Massachusetts	77.5	8.5	9.7	4.1	0.2
Michigan	75.6	18.8	2.9	1.6	1.0
Minnesota	**85.5**	**5.6**	**2.5**	**4.4**	**2.0**
Mississippi	**47.8**	**51.0**	**0.4**	**0.6**	**0.1**
Missouri	80.7	16.7	1.3	1.1	0.3
Montana	**87.1**	**0.6**	**1.4**	**0.8**	**10.0**
Nebraska	**85.7**	**6.2**	**5.3**	**1.4**	**1.5**
Nevada	63.2	9.7	20.5	4.8	1.9
New Hampshire	**96.3**	**1.0**	**1.4**	**1.1**	**0.2**
New Jersey	61.9	18.3	14.0	5.7	0.2
New Mexico	38.0	2.4	48.0	1.0	10.6
New York	55.9	20.4	17.8	5.4	0.5
North Carolina	63.2	31.0	2.7	1.6	1.5
North Dakota	**88.9**	**0.9**	**1.1**	**0.8**	**8.3**
Ohio	81.7	15.6	1.5	1.0	0.1
Oklahoma	**68.1**	**10.6**	**4.5**	**1.3**	**15.5**
Oregon	83.7	2.6	8.1	3.5	2.1
Pennsylvania	79.7	14.5	3.9	1.8	0.1
Rhode Island	77.2	7.5	11.5	3.4	0.5
South Carolina	**55.7**	**42.3**	**1.0**	**0.8**	**0.2**
South Dakota	**82.9**	**1.0**	**0.9**	**0.8**	**14.4**
Tennessee	74.0	23.7	1.1	1.0	0.1
Texas	45.0	14.4	37.9	2.4	0.3
Utah	88.7	0.8	6.5	2.5	1.5
Vermont	**97.1**	**0.9**	**0.4**	**1.1**	**0.5**
Virginia	65.5	27.0	3.6	3.6	0.2
Washington	76.8	4.9	8.6	6.9	2.8
West Virginia	**95.1**	**4.1**	**0.5**	**0.3**	**0.1**
Wisconsin	**82.2**	**9.8**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**1.4**
Wyoming	**88.6**	**1.1**	**6.6**	**0.8**	**2.9**

The percentage distribution by state was obtained from the SSS (1993-94), the percentage distribution by race or ethnicity is reported in the Digest of Education Statistics (1999)

Table 3
Percentage of public elementary and secondary students participating in free or reduced-price lunch programs, by state: 1993-94.

	Students Receiving	
	Elementary	Secondary
United States	**37.9**	**21.9**
Alabama	47.3	31.1
Alaska	**21.7**	**9.0**
Arizona	42.6	22.4
Arkansas	**46.0**	**28.3**
California	45.2	22.7
Colorado	30.0	12.2
Connecticut	19.4	10.5
Delaware	30.4	19.5
District of Columbia	69.4	40.5
Florida	43.1	23.3
Georgia	42.4	25.7
Hawaii	34.9	20.0
Idaho	**31.0**	**19.8**
Illinois	35.0	19.8
Indiana	30.1	14.5
Iowa	**27.6**	**20.2**
Kansas	**31.2**	**20.3**
Kentucky	**44.1**	**29.6**
Louisiana	55.5	37.2
Maine	**32.1**	**16.4**
Maryland	28.5	15.1
Massachusetts	24.3	15.2
Michigan	31.4	19.6
Minnesota	**24.1**	**21.8**
Mississippi	**53.3**	**52.8**
Missouri	36.8	19.3
Montana	**31.0**	**19.8**
Nebraska	**28.9**	**23.8**
Nevada	29.8	5.9
New Hampshire	**17.6**	**10.8**
New Jersey	28.7	16.2
New Mexico	52.5	29.8
New York	46.6	22.3
North Carolina	38.1	19.7
North Dakota	**28.4**	**21.7**
Ohio	30.7	15.2
Oklahoma	**40.6**	**28.0**
Oregon	32.3	14.3
Pennsylvania	33.9	22.8
Rhode Island	31.7	9.8
South Carolina	**45.7**	**26.8**
South Dakota	**31.0**	**26.4**
Tennessee	40.8	24.6
Texas	43.6	28.8
Utah	29.3	18.5
Vermont	**25.0**	**14.8**
Virginia	30.6	18.3
Washington	30.6	17.1
West Virginia	**46.7**	**27.3**
Wisconsin	**27.2**	**19.3**
Wyoming	**27.4**	**16.7**

States in bold are the top-20 rural states.

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 1993-94, p. 33

The statistics for the free or reduced-price lunch programs are nearly a mirror image of the statistics presented in Table 2. States with the highest percentage of minorities are the states with the highest percentage of elementary students participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program.

Table 4
Minimum teacher salaries, by state: 1997-98

State	Minimum (beginning) salary
United States	**$25,735**
Alabama	27,388
Alaska	**33,162**
Arizona	24,917
Arkansas	**21,000**
California	27,852
Colorado	24,867
Connecticut	29,506
Delaware	25,493
District of Columbia	27,234
Florida	25,266
Georgia	26,706
Hawaii	26,744
Idaho	**20,248**
Illinois	28,183
Indiana	24,716
Iowa	**22,475**
Kansas	**22,445**
Kentucky	**23,536**
Louisiana	22,843
Maine	**21,554**
Maryland	27,010
Massachusetts	27,238
Michigan	27,064
Minnesota	**26,266**
Mississippi	**20,630**
Missouri	24,125
Montana	**21,045**
Nebraska	**21,949**
Nevada	28,641
New Hampshire	**23,927**
New Jersey	28,319
New Mexico	23,297
New York	30,204
North Carolina	22,150
North Dakota	**19,146**
Ohio	22,535
Oklahoma	**23,676**
Oregon	26,098
Pennsylvania	29,581
Rhode Island	26,300
South Carolina	**23,427**
South Dakota	**20,340**
Tennessee	22,140
Texas	24,736
Utah	22,241
Vermont	**25,183**
Virginia	25,272
Washington	23,860
West Virginia	**22,529**
Wisconsin	**24,077**
Wyoming	**22,230**

Source: Digest of Education Statistics 1999, p. 87

Table 4 reports teacher salaries. In a review comparing the salaries from 1995-96 with the salaries reported for 1997-98, 4 states (Alaska, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Wisconsin) of the top-20 decreased in minimum salary. Although the remaining 16 states increased their minimum salary from 1995 to 1997, teachers in those states still receive lower salaries. Of the 20 rural states highlighted in Table 1, 18 (Alaska and Minnesota are the exceptions) have an average teacher salary that is lower than the national average.

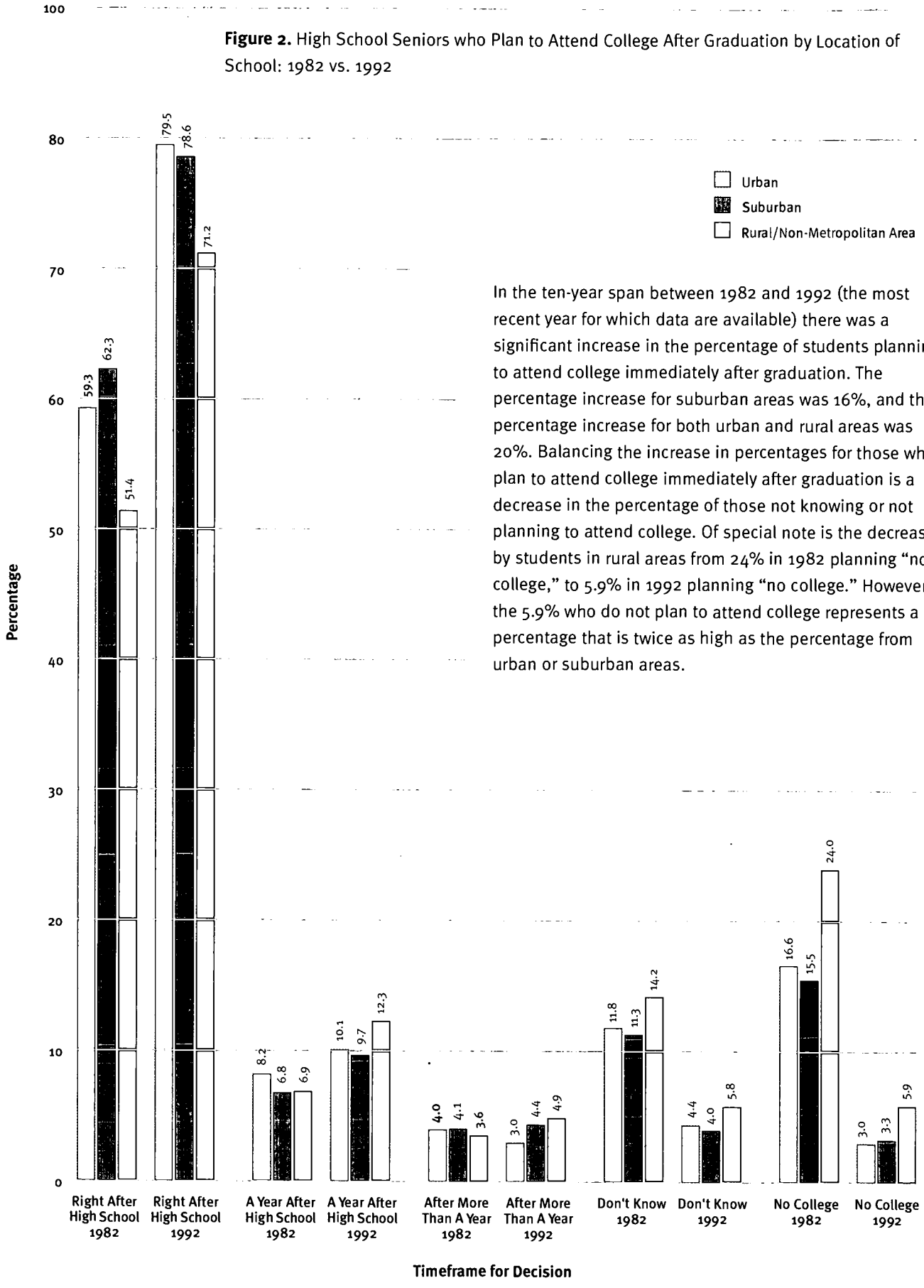
Table 5
Number and Enrollment of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1998-99

State	Total # of schools	Total Enrollment	Number of Elementary Schools	Elemenatry School Enrollment	Number of Secondary Schools	Secondary School Enrollment
United States	**91,062**	**46,534,687**	**63,574**	**33,343,787**	**22,103**	**13,190,900**
Top Twenty	**21,682**	**7,600,056**	**14,200**	**5,308,616**	**6,363**	**2,291,340**
Alabama	1,516	747,970	907	542,340	416	205,630
Alaska	**502**	**135,373**	**196**	**96,979**	**94**	**38,394**
Arizona	1,570	848,262	1,042	622,747	370	225,515
Arkansas	**1,109**	**452,256**	**688**	**319,232**	**416**	**133,024**
California	8,343	5,925,964	6,075	4,269,853	1,962	1,656,111
Colorado	1,560	699,135	1,120	501,449	373	197,686
Connecticut	1,104	544,698	822	399,371	211	145,317
Delaware	201	113,262	126	79,955	47	33,307
District of Columbia	164	71,889	122	56,712	31	15,177
Florida	3,111	2,337,633	2,104	1,704,024	456	633,609
Georgia	1,843	1,401,291	1,471	1,029,386	306	371,905
Hawaii	254	188,069	193	134,685	51	53,384
Idaho	**660**	**244,722**	**408**	**168,604**	**222**	**76,118**
Illinois	4,302	2,011,530	3,134	1,451,579	1,011	559,951
Indiana	1,958	988,094	1,414	696,832	463	291,262
Iowa	**1,555**	**498,214**	**1,072**	**336,696**	**446**	**161,518**
Kansas	**1,437**	**472,353**	**1,008**	**327,474**	**422**	**144,879**
Kentucky	**1,534**	**655,687**	**1,029**	**464,567**	**459**	**191,120**
Louisiana	1,510	768,734	1,019	558,473	329	210,261
Maine	**720**	**210,503**	**543**	**150,860**	**160**	**59,643**
Maryland	1,357	841,671	1,061	606,560	249	235,111
Massachusetts	1,900	962,317	1,507	704,624	363	257,693
Michigan	3,914	1,720,266	2,652	1,245,299	871	474,967
Minnesota	**2,348**	**855,119**	**1,237**	**585,553**	**715**	**269,566**
Mississippi	**1,015**	**502,379**	**573**	**365,497**	**310**	**136,882**
Missouri	2,328	912,445	1,527	650,545	636	261,900
Montana	**886**	**159,988**	**516**	**109,535**	**361**	**50,453**
Nebraska	**1,352**	**291,140**	**988**	**199,754**	**351**	**91,386**
Nevada	469	311,061	346	229,275	93	81,786
New Hampshire	**516**	**204,713**	**418**	**146,722**	**98**	**57,991**
New Jersey	2,318	1,268,996	1,796	936,428	432	332,568
New Mexico	746	328,753	546	232,485	189	96,268
New York	4,230	2,877,143	3,041	2,028,167	935	848,976
North Carolina	2,106	1,254,821	1,647	920,838	376	333,983
North Dakota	**595**	**114,597**	**342**	**76,860**	**216**	**37,737**
Ohio	3,852	1,842,559	2,739	1,301,438	972	541,151
Oklahoma	**1,825**	**628,492**	**1,224**	**447,906**	**593**	**180,586**
Oregon	1,275	542,809	937	379,770	281	163,039
Pennsylvania	3,205	1,816,414	2,365	1,267,226	789	549,188
Rhode Island	318	154,785	258	112,483	54	42,302
South Carolina	**1,101**	**664,592**	**801**	**477,850**	**280**	**186,742**
South Dakota	**778**	**132,495**	**475**	**90,887**	**289**	**41,608**
Tennessee	1,589	905,442	1,165	664,570	366	240,872
Texas	7,228	3,945,367	4,845	2,868,209	1,912	1,077,158
Utah	769	481,176	496	328,522	243	152,654
Vermont	**395**	**105,120**	**280**	**73,257**	**70**	**31,863**
Virginia	1,918	1,124,022	1,421	815,266	349	308,756
Washington	2,234	998,053	1,364	695,950	577	302,103
West Virginia	**857**	**297,530**	**608**	**205,740**	**215**	**91,690**
Wisconsin	**2,109**	**879,542**	**1,526**	**600,703**	**542**	**278,839**
Wyoming	**388**	**95,241**	**268**	**63,940**	**104**	**31,301**

Source: Digest of Education Statistics 2000, Pgs. 51 and 116.

Forty percent of the states (represented by the top-20 states) comprise 24% of the total number of schools and 16% of the total enrollment. Although gifted rural students may not represent a majority, they do represent an important number of students overall; using the conservative estimate of 3% of the population as gifted, this represents a figure of nearly 230,000 students.

Figure 2. High School Seniors who Plan to Attend College After Graduation by Location of School: 1982 vs. 1992



In the ten-year span between 1982 and 1992 (the most recent year for which data are available) there was a significant increase in the percentage of students planning to attend college immediately after graduation. The percentage increase for suburban areas was 16%, and the percentage increase for both urban and rural areas was 20%. Balancing the increase in percentages for those who plan to attend college immediately after graduation is a decrease in the percentage of those not knowing or not planning to attend college. Of special note is the decrease by students in rural areas from 24% in 1982 planning "no college," to 5.9% in 1992 planning "no college." However, the 5.9% who do not plan to attend college represents a percentage that is twice as high as the percentage from urban or suburban areas.

Table 6
Household income and poverty rates, by state: 1997-98 AND Estimated total and school-age resident populations, by state: 1998 (In thousands)

State	Median Household Income 1997-98 (Two-year average)	Total Population, all ages (In thousands)	Population of 5 to 17 year-olds (In thousands)	Poverty Status of related children, 5- to 17-years old 1998 (Percent in poverty)
United States	**$38,233**	**270,299**	**50,906**	**17.8**
Top Twenty Average	35,414 (Avg.)	42,925 (Total)	8,272 (Total)	15.2 (Avg.)
Alabama	34,351	4,352	789	21.8
Alaska	**49,717**	**614**	**143**	**9.0**
Arizona	35,170	4,669	895	23.6
Arkansas	**27,117**	**2,538**	**479**	**13.1**
California	40,623	32,667	6,347	22.3
Colorado	45,253	3,971	762	12.5
Connecticut	45,589	3,274	579	13.4
Delaware	42,581	744	130	15.7
District of Columbia	32,895	523	72	46.0
Florida	33,935	14,916	2,587	20.5
Georgia	37,950	7,642	1,454	24.7
Hawaii	41,199	1,193	214	14.5
Idaho	**35,302**	**1,229**	**260**	**17.4**
Illinois	42,552	12,045	2,297	12.1
Indiana	39,613	5,899	1,107	12.6
Iowa	**35,664**	**2,862**	**540**	**14.2**
Kansas	**36,875**	**2,629**	**515**	**13.2**
Kentucky	**35,113**	**3,936**	**725**	**16.7**
Louisiana	32,757	4,369	878	29.8
Maine	**34,461**	**1,244**	**224**	**12.0**
Maryland	48,714	5,135	943	8.10
Massachusetts	42,511	6,147	1,064	15.0
Michigan	40,583	9,817	1,895	14.8
Minnesota	**45,576**	**4,725**	**942**	**12.6**
Mississippi	**29,031**	**2,752**	**555**	**19.3**
Missouri	38,662	5,439	1,043	14.4
Montana	**30,622**	**880**	**172**	**21.2**
Nebraska	**35,823**	**1,663**	**331**	**14.8**
Nevada	39,608	1,747	331	12.8
New Hampshire	**43,297**	**1,185**	**225**	**13.3**
New Jersey	49,297	8,115	1,443	13.2
New Mexico	31,049	1,737	371	23.5
New York	36,875	18,175	3,249	28.9
North Carolina	36,118	7,546	1,393	21.3
North Dakota	**31,229**	**638**	**122**	**17.2**
Ohio	37,811	11,209	2,102	16.0
Oklahoma	**32,783**	**3,347**	**651**	**19.9**
Oregon	38,447	3,282	608	19.4
Pennsylvania	38,558	12,001	2,140	18.0
Rhode Island	38,012	988	176	20.5
South Carolina	**34,031**	**3,836**	**706**	**17.6**
South Dakota	**31,471**	**738**	**151**	**9.2**
Tennessee	32,602	5,431	969	14.5
Texas	35,702	19,760	4,014	20.1
Utah	43,870	2,100	498	11.8
Vermont	**37,485**	**591**	**109**	**12.2**
Virginia	43,490	6,791	1,198	7.9
Washington	46,339	5,689	1,086	10.8
West Virginia	**27,310**	**1,811**	**305**	**25.7**
Wisconsin	**40,769**	**5,224**	**1,018**	**11.5**
Wyoming	**34,597**	**481**	**99**	**13.0**

Source: Digest of Education Statistics 1999, Pgs. 24 and 27.

The average household income for the top-20 rural states is slightly lower than the average household income for the United States. Four of the states, Alaska, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin, have average household incomes that exceed the US average, however, the remaining 16 states have a household income that is lower than the US average. However, the average percentage of 5-17 year olds in poverty is slightly lower than the US average. The exceptions are Mississippi, Montana, Oklahoma, and West Virginia.

Table 7
Direct general expenditures per capita* of state and local governments for elementary and secondary education by level and state: 1995-96

State	Amount per capita
United States	**$1,053**
Top-20 Average	**$1,083**
Alabama	835
Alaska	**1,942**
Arizona	923
Arkansas	**797**
California	938
Colorado	1,019
Connecticut	1,285
Delaware	1,107
District of Columbia	1,099
Florida	948
Georgia	1,069
Hawaii	800
Idaho	**991**
Illinois	1,008
Indiana	1,022
Iowa	**996**
Kansas	**1,099**
Kentucky	**886**
Louisiana	867
Maine	1,048
Maryland	1,052
Massachusetts	996
Michigan	1,194
Minnesota	**1,295**
Mississippi	**849**
Missouri	967
Montana	**1,116**
Nebraska	**1,169**
Nevada	942
New Hampshire	**1,043**
New Jersey	1,423
New Mexico	878
New York	1,440
North Carolina	872
North Dakota	**935**
Ohio	1,065
Oklahoma	**940**
Oregon	1,122
Pennsylvania	1,041
Rhode Island	1,083
South Carolina	**935**
South Dakota	**919**
Tennessee	800
Texas	1,052
Utah	1,048
Vermont	**1,123**
Virginia	1,001
Washington	1,158
West Virginia	**993**
Wisconsin	**1,221**
Wyoming	**1,358**

* *Figures indicate amount spent per person in that state.*

Source: Digest of Education Statistics 1999, p. 39

The average of the top-20 rural states is near the US average. However, there is quite a range, with Alaska spending almost twice as much as the average of the top-20 states, and Arkansas spending 74% of the top-20 average.

Appendix B.

Iowa Timeline of Education

Iowa Timeline of Education

☐ *Gifted*
☐ **Rural**
☐ General Iowa

1830 First school in Iowa Territory was Galland School in Lee County.

1846 Iowa becomes the 29th state to join the Union.

1847 The State University of Iowa, first state university, is founded. Later, it is renamed The University of Iowa.

1858 State legislature passes the School Act of 1858, sometimes called the Free School Act, which laid the foundation for Iowa's public school system.

Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm, the nation's first land-grant college, is chartered. Later, it is renamed Iowa State University.

1868 Alexander Clark, Sr. sued the Muscatine schools to allow admission of his daughter. The Iowa Supreme Court held that "separate" was not "equal" and ordered Susan Clark, an African-American, admitted to the public schools. This effectively integrated Iowa's schools 96 years before the federal court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education in Topeka*, KS. Alexander Clark, Jr. was the first African-American graduate of the College of Law at The University of Iowa. Alexander Clark, Sr. was, himself, the second one.

1876 Iowa State Normal School is founded. In 1909, it becomes Iowa State Teachers College; in 1961, it is renamed the State College of Iowa, and from 1967 to present is known as The University of Northern Iowa.

1897 Consolidated schools spell the beginning of the end for the one-room rural schools and the independent districts. Because of the excellence of Iowa's educational system, the literacy rate in this state became the highest in the nation, hovering around 99.5%.

1913 Iowa Department of Public Instruction is established.

Drive to consolidate rural schools continues.

1935 Iowa Testing Programs, an academic unit in the College of Education at The University of Iowa, introduces Iowa Every Pupil Tests, later named Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), the first Iowa standardized achievement tests for students in grades K through 8.

1942 Iowa Testing Programs introduces Iowa Tests of Educational Development, standardized achievement tests for students in grades 9 through 12.

1959 ACT's founders establish the American College Testing Program. This college-entrance testing program evolves from the Iowa Tests of Educational Development at The University of Iowa.

☐ *Gifted*
☐ **Rural**
☐ General Iowa

1973 *Statewide organization for Gifted, Iowa Talented and Gifted (ITAG), is initiated by advisory committee members.*

1974 *Iowa Talented and Gifted (ITAG) is officially organized and the first ITAG conference is held in Fort Dodge.*

1976 *First gifted education legislative efforts. Department of Public Instruction designates $45,000 to be used for "in-service training" for local teachers about gifted education.*

1977 *First annual Iowa Summer Institute for Gifted Education (later named CONTAG) is held at Coe College, Cedar Rapids.*

1978 *HF 2361 provides money for two-year pilot programs for instruction of TAG for up to ten school districts.*

Affiliation of first ten local ITAG chapters.

1979 *First ITAG recognition awards are given for excellence in teaching the gifted. Later, these are known as the "Distinguished Service Award."*

First Problem-Solving Super Bowl.

1980 *A grant from the Myron & Jacqueline N. Blank Education Foundation marks the beginning of the Belin Fellowship Teacher Training Program.*

1981 *Seventeen teachers from Des Moines and West Des Moines participate in the first Belin Fellowship Teacher Training Program.*

Iowa Code 442.31 authorized additional allowable growth funds for gifted students upon submission of a comprehensive plan from a school district or school board.

1984 *Over half of the public school districts in Iowa have programs for gifted and talented students (237 out of 438 districts).*

1985 *Mini-grants are offered by ITAG to gifted students.*

1986 *Young Scholars Conference is held at Drake University, Des Moines.*

ITAG initiates high school and advanced research awards.

1988 *The Connie Belin National Center for Gifted Education is established at The University of Iowa.*

Myron & Jacqueline N. Blank establish an endowed chair in gifted education at the University of Iowa.

Iowa Governor's Institute for the Gifted and Talented is awarded to the Belin Center.

Post Secondary Enrollment Options Act enacted.

☐ *Gifted*
☐ **Rural**
☐ General Iowa

1989 *First Annual Talent Search for Iowa seventh and eighth graders, Iowa State University.*

1990 *First Leadership Institute for TAG professionals in Iowa is conducted at The University of Iowa.*

1991 *First Henry B. and Jocelyn Wallace National Research Symposium on Talent Development takes place at the University of Iowa.*

1992 *Iowa TAG Endorsement is established and is required by Aug. 31, 1995.*

Post Secondary Education Options Act is changed to include ninth and tenth grade identified gifted.

1993 *Elementary Talent Search, named the Belin Elementary Student Talent Search (BESTS), is established.*

1995 *The Belin Center is renamed the Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development.*

1998 **The Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa initiates a *National Program for Gifted Education in Rural Schools*.**

1999 **The Belin-Blank Center publishes *Gifted Education in Rural Schools: A National Assessment* and hosts the First Biennial Wallace Family National Conference on Gifted Education in Rural Schools.**

National Academy of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering, an early entrance program is established at The University of Iowa.

Amended Iowa Code 257 changes TAG funding from property tax dependent money to state funding.

2000 *The Belin-Blank Center's Middle School Talent Search (MSTS) is established.*

2001 ***The Belin-Blank Center publishes* Gifted Voices from Rural America *and hosts the Second Biennial Wallace Family National Conference on Gifted Education in Rural Schools.***

Sources: State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa Talented and Gifted Newsletters (1974-2001)
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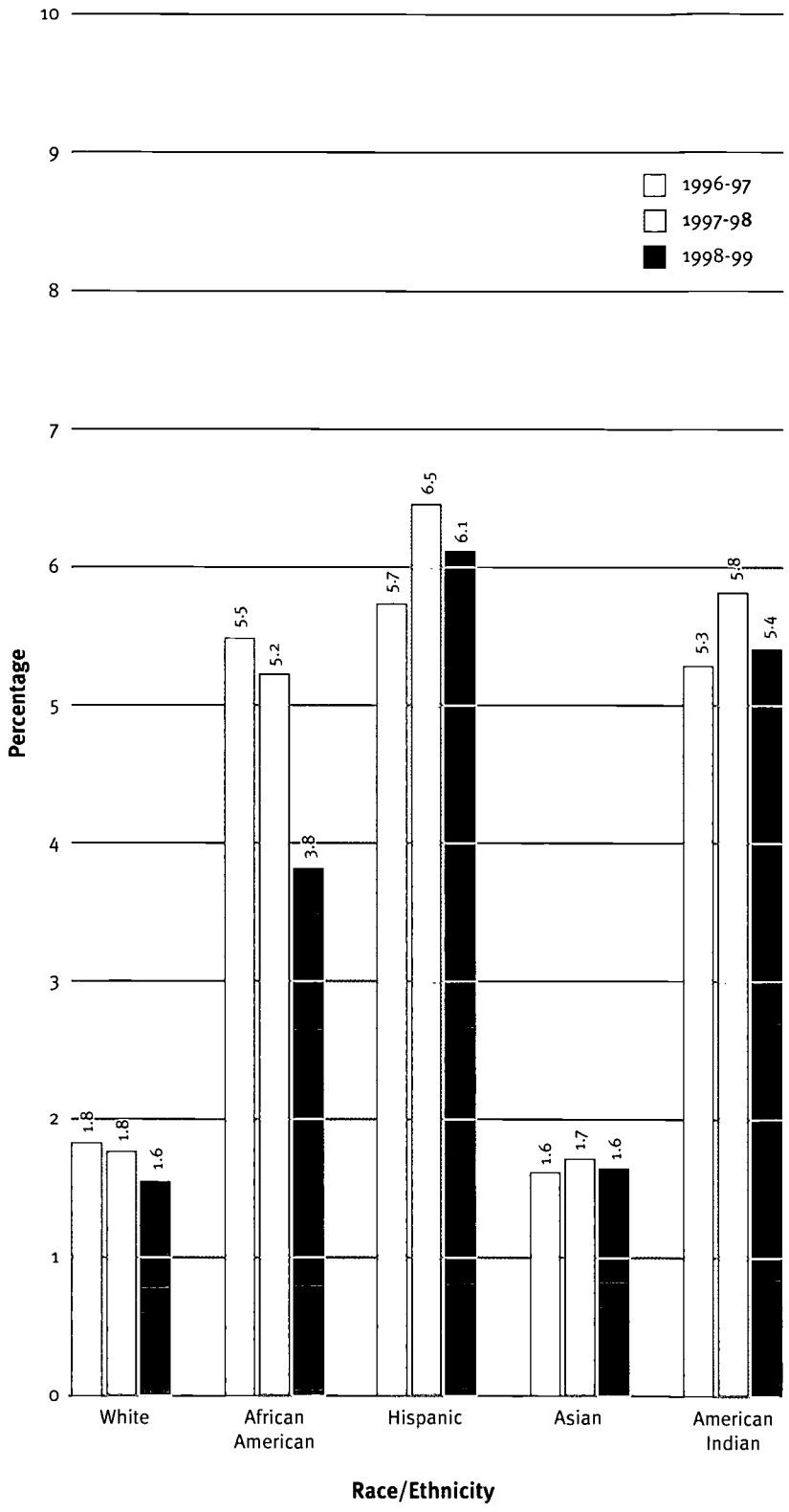
The Belin-Blank Center is part of The University of Iowa; therefore, as part of our on-going series of reports, we want to highlight the state of Iowa. We are proud of the fact that Iowa is known for its leadership in educational initiatives, specifically for special education and gifted education.

Appendix C.

Iowa School Data

Iowa Grade 7-12 Dropouts as Percent of Public School Students in Grades 7-12 by Race/Ethnicity.



Iowa Public High School Enrollment Distribution 1999-2000

Grade 9-12 Enrollment	Number of High Schools	Percent of High Schools
<100	20	5.5
100-199	104	28.3
200-299	94	25.6
300-399	48	13.7
400-499	16	4.4
500-599	23	6.3
600-699	11	3.0
700-799	6	1.6
800-899	2	0.5
900-999	2	0.5
1,000-1,099	5	1.4
1,100-1,199	4	1.1
1,200-1,299	8	2.2
1,300-1,399	6	1.6
1,400-1,499	3	0.8
1,500-1,599	6	1.6
1,600-1,699	4	1.1
1,700-1,799	3	0.8
1,800+	2	0.5

Source: Condition of Education 2000, P. 36

Average Salaries, Advanced Degree, and Total Experience of Iowa Full-Time Public School Teachers (by Enrollment Category) 1999-2000

Enrollment Category	Average Salary 1999-2000	Percent Advanced Degree* 1999-2000	Average Years Teaching 1999-2000
<250	27,099	9.0	10.9
250-399	29,777	14.0	13.4
400-599	31,448	15.2	14.0
600-999	33,037	19.4	15.2
1,000-2,499	35,316	25.7	15.7
2,500-7,499	37,991	35.1	15.9
7,500+	38,931	41.0	15.4
State	**35,678**	**28.8**	**15.3**

* *Masters degree or higher.*
Source: Condition of Education 2000, P. 53

Characteristics of Iowa Full-Time Minority Public School Teachers 1999-2000

Characteristics	White	Minority
Number	32,397	573
Percent	98.3	1.7
Average Age	42.3	40.1
Percent Female	70.1	67.0
Percent Advanced Degree	28.7	30.9
Average Total Experience	15.3	11.3
Average District Experience	12.3	8.8
Average Salary*	$35,686	$35,212

* *Does not include Phase III funds.*
Source: Condition of Education 2000, P. 52

Percent of Iowa Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Meals by Enrollment Category 1998-1999 and 1999-2000

	1998-1999 Free or Reduced Eligible Students		1999-2000 Free or Reduced Eligible Students	
Enrollment Category	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<250	1,256	39.1	1,317	37.4
250-399	5,127	31.3	5,543	30.3
400-599	8,812	25.4	9,150	24.9
600-999	20,981	24.8	19,019	22.9
1,000-2,499	31,151	24.9	30,771	24.2
2,500-7,499	22,843	22.6	21,247	21.9
7,500+	45,407	35.4	43,887	33.4
State	**135,577**	**27.5**	**130,934**	**26.3**

Source: Condition of Education 2000, P. 18

Appendix D.

Programs of the Belin-Blank Center

Professional Development

Belin-Blank Fellowship Program

Precollege Faculty Training Program

AP Teacher Training Institute

Pre-service and Summer Workshops

Practicum in Teaching and Curriculum Development

Endorsement in Gifted and Talented Education

Belin-Blank Advanced Leadership Institute

Talent Searches

Belin Elementary Student Talent Search

Middle School Talent Search

National Recognition Program for High School Scholars

International Talent Searches

Student Programs

Challenges for Elementary School Students

Junior Scholars Academy

Iowa Governor's Summer Institute for Gifted and Talented Students

Blank Summer Institute for the Arts and Sciences

Environmental Health Sciences Institute for Rural Youth

Iowa Talent Project

Summer Institute for Creative Engineering and Inventiveness

Project ACHIEVE

National Scholars Academy

Wallace Rural Scholars Institute

Weekend Institute for Gifted Students

Research

Precollege Students

College Students

Inventors

Families

ACT National Data Bases

Talent Search Data Base

Iowa Acceleration Scale

Clinical and Assessment Services

Psychological and Educational Assessment

Family Education Program

Counseling Laboratory for Talent Development

Practicum in Counseling and Psychological Services

Special Events

Wallace Research Symposium on Talent Development

Wallace National Policy Conference

Wallace National Conference on Gifted Education in Rural Schools

Belin-Blank Recognition Ceremony

Invent Iowa State Convention

American Regions Mathematics League

Out-Reach

Invent Iowa In-services

Weekend/Distance Learning Programs

Staff Development

School Consultations

Program Evaluations

International Programs

International Seminars and Consultations

Research and Training

University Programs

College of Education Honors Opportunity Program (HOP)

National Academy of Arts, Sciences and Engineering (NAASE)

University ACHIEVE

Iowa Talent Project (ITP)

Development and Public Relations

Federal Grants

State Grants

The University of Iowa

Private Foundations

Individual Benefactors

Fund Raising

Media Relations

The Belin-Blank Center is dedicated to exploring the nature of high levels of academic, inventive, and artistic talent and to increasing the understanding of gifted individuals and their educational needs.

A major mission of the Belin-Blank Center is the sharing of expertise and information about gifted education and talent development. The Center has developed strong relationships with schools throughout the nation and, increasingly, throughout the world. These connections allow the Center to assist administrators, counselors, teachers, and parents.

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