



## Printable Edition

**Note:** This resource includes all articles from the October 2013 Rural Policy Matters newsletter. For the latest content updates, please check the [issue index](#) for this edition.

*Editor's note:* Links are free and current at time of posting, but may require registration or expire over time.

## Facts and Figures About Advanced Education Degrees Among Adults

**Question:** A higher percentage of adults in metro counties hold college or professional degrees than do adults in nonmetro counties. Has that gap been closing or growing wider in recent years?

**Answer:** Growing wider. The gap increased from 9.5% in 1990 to 12.6% in 2009.

*Source:* Rural America At A Glance, 2011 Edition, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. [www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib-economic-information-bulletin/eib85.aspx](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib-economic-information-bulletin/eib85.aspx)

## Applications for 2014 Global Teacher Fellowship Program Now Open

The Rural Trust's [Global Teacher Fellowship](#) program will be awarding up to 25 fellowships in 2014 to support the professional and personal development of rural teachers.

The awards (up to \$5,000 for individual teachers and \$10,000 for a team of two or more teachers) support teachers' participation in self-designed summer learning experiences and a two-day place-based learning institute in the fall following the summer experience. This fellowship is a stand-alone grant not meant to supplement other grant funds for larger projects.

Teachers are encouraged to center their learning in an **international travel and study experience**, out of which they develop interdisciplinary, place-based learning curricula aligned with their specific state and local content standards.

**Eligibility:** Any K–12 teacher working full-time and teaching at least 60% time in a rural community can apply for the fellowship. Counselors, media specialists, and other school personnel working in a teaching setting for at least 60% of their paid work time may also apply.

The Rural Trust defines a rural community by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) locale codes: 32 (Town, Distant); 33 (Town, Remote); 41 (Rural, Fringe); 42 (Rural, Distant); or 43 (Rural, Remote). If your school is listed in one of these locale codes, you are eligible to apply. If your school or district is REAP eligible, you may also apply. **For more details on eligibility, [see the FAQs page](#)**

Don't miss [2013 Global Teacher Fellows Share Experiences](#) in this issue of RPM.

You can learn more about the Global Teacher Fellowship program at [www.globalteacherfellowship.ruraledu.org/](http://www.globalteacherfellowship.ruraledu.org/).

## 2013 Global Teacher Fellows Share Experiences

For Jenna Hunter it was watching the rapid decline of family farming in her rural North Carolina community and wanting to find ways that her students could help protect their land and still earn a living. For Pam Dow and Meg Allison it was gaining a new appreciation for the importance of storytelling after floods devastated their small Vermont town. For Selena Montgomery it was concern about the health of local children and a desire to do more to meet the growing diversity in her south Georgia community. Nicole Buschmann and Maribeth Dann wanted to stretch themselves well beyond their usual comfort zones—and gain an understanding of how the ecosystems in their rural Missouri farming town connect to those on the other side of the world.

The 32 rural teachers who traveled the globe as 2013 [Global Teacher Fellows](#) each had their own reasons for making a journey to another part of the world. But they all came back with renewed enthusiasm, fresh perspective, an expanded appreciation for their own place, and deeper faith in the capabilities of their students to make their own communities—and the world—better for everyone.

You can read [descriptions](#) of each of the 2013 Global Fellows and their travels [here](#). As in previous years, Fellows underscored the importance of being trusted to create their own challenging learning experience. They reveled in a sense of discovery and freedom, experienced unexpected insight, and found new wells of inspiration for teaching. And they all expressed a deep gratitude for a life-changing opportunity.

In this issue of *RPM* we'll hear from several Fellows about their experiences, with an emphasis on some of the thought-provoking ideas their travels inspired.

### "I can be a contributor"

[Jenna Hunter](#) graduated from Orange County High in Hillsborough, North Carolina and taught in New York City before returning four years ago to teach science at her alma mater. "Hillsborough was founded in dairy and tobacco farms," Hunter explains. "But that agricultural economic base has eroded. Quickly. 'Few farms still exist as well-functioning and profitable,'" she says. "Tobacco farmers have had to switch, mostly to soy or small organic produce operations. Most of the dairy farms no longer have cattle because they can't compete with factory farms. There are so many farmers who are out of work in a community that once thrived because of farming. Our students are from generations of farmers and they are watching these changes and wondering what they are going to do."

Hunter shares her students' love of their place and wanted to find ways to protect it. "I got interested in ecotourism as a tool for conservation of biodiversity and as an economic development strategy that could help preserve the land and place that we love," she says. "I was also excited about the place-based learning component that is part of the Global Fellows opportunity. I wanted to do something that could translate for our students in a way they would find interesting and applicable."



*Orange County High students studying their local environment.*



Hunter chose to travel to Costa Rica, where she visited nine eco-lodges. "Costa Rica pretty much wrote the book on ecotourism," she says. "The lodges were very different takes on the same idea. It demonstrated that there is a market that can make money for the local economy and serve a good purpose."

Back in North Carolina, teams of students in Hunter's Advanced Placement Environmental Sciences classes are working directly with a local farmer to consider potential conservation uses of his family's farm. "Students can come up with their own ideas for what they think fits our community," she says.

There were additional personal boosts that Hunter wasn't expecting. "Teaching Environmental Sciences is difficult. The problems are so big that it can feel a little hopeless, and it can be hard to find ways to help the students feel motivated. With the changes in the economic status of our community, a sense of powerlessness comes in multiple veins for our students."

*Orange County High students study a creek near the school*

In Costa Rica, Hunter met many people "passionate about where they are from and taking steps to make it a good place to be," she says. "Seeing their sense of ownership and responsibility was inspiring. I didn't know how much I needed that."

Hunter's students are enthusiastic about the work they are doing. "I have so much more sense of purpose now," Hunter says. "The idea that I can be a contributor to the community and the people as a result of this trip, I didn't see that coming."

### **We are all connected.**

**Jennice Wright** teaches sixth, seventh, and eighth grade social studies at Auxvasse Elementary School in central Missouri, where the curriculum emphasizes civic skills and global competencies. "I've always been interested in democratic change and democratic movements," she explains.

The opportunity to travel to Morocco, an Arab Spring country where democratic reforms are being implemented successfully and peacefully, was just what Wright was looking for. "So much of what students and their families see in the media highlights the failures of democracy and democratic movements and gives the impression that those countries are full of scary people who hate democracy and other religions. It is important for them to see a success story, one that helps demystify that part of the world," she says.



*Moulay Idriss, Morocco*

Wright chose to spend most of her time in the small town of Moulay Idriss, where she stayed in a guesthouse and with a local teacher. By remaining in one place she says she was able to fall into the pattern of daily life. "People invited me into their homes and worked hard to make my trip special. Even before I arrived, people were calling the guesthouse to see if I needed anything. They were helping me build my global network even before they met me," she says.

Almost everyday, Wright posted photos of her daily experience on Facebook: the people she met, children playing, the markets, and the landscape in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. She also sent postcards home to her students in Auxvasse.



*Spice market in Meknes, Morocco*

"People were very taken with the architecture and the beauty. In the photos they could see me in another place surrounded by warm friendly people who cared about me and my experiences. What had been concern about my safety began to turn into excitement about what I would be doing next," observes Wright.

Now students have a more personal connection when they talk about Arab Spring. "So much of that movement was shaped by young people using social media and expressions of youth culture like Hip Hop. That's something my students can relate to."

Wright is always asking the question: how are our kids acquiring the skills and confidence to be active citizens—in our community and in the world? She knew traveling to another country would expand her own thinking. "This experience helped build my own global competencies," she

adds. "That's important as I help my students develop theirs."

### **...And we are all unique**

As a 1st/2nd grade teacher and librarian at Moretown Elementary in Vermont, **Pamela Dow and Meg Allison** say that literacy and books are at the heart of everything they do. In 2011 Tropical Storm Irene flooded the Mad River and much of the town, including the school building. "It was a real crossroads for our community," says Allison. "People wanted to be together. When everything is stripped away it's

about community, our person-to-person connections and talking about what had happened. Stories were such a comfort for our students.”

So when the two decided to apply to be Global Fellows, it felt completely natural to go to the heart of the European fairy tale. “Fairy tales speak to universal themes. They are quests for identity, or a new world is revealed,” says Allison.

“And there’s always a little magic,” adds Dow. “In a sense place doesn’t matter; the magic is in a metaphor that helps children imagine what they can be.”

Many people assumed they would go to Germany. “But Charles Perrault was writing down folk tales in Paris 200 years before the Grimm Brothers,” says Dow. Many of the older fairy tales like Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel originated in the mountains of what are now France and Italy. And, many were based on real people. “There are strong female role models behind many of these tales. That helps bring them to life for our students,” Dow adds.

“To see the royal gardens and the castles that gave rise to these stories gave us a new appreciation for the importance of place—of landscape and architecture,” says Allison. “In medieval towns and parts of Paris, the small streets with rows and rows of unique doors and windows were incredible.”



*Knight's suit near the Guinigi Tower, Lucca, Italy*



*Overlooking a canal in the Cannaregio neighborhood of Venice, Italy*

Doors and portals have become an organizing theme, not only for interpreting their trip, but also for their work back home. “Portals serve an important literary function in fairy tales,” says Allison. “When the character steps through one, they are transformed or are suddenly in a new and exciting place. And you, as the reader or listener, get let in on the story. You too are transformed.”

Moretown has its own distinctive landscape and historic architecture. “We have beautiful barns and silos instead of castles and towers,” Allison notes. “And we have lots of interesting doors and windows.”

Moretown students will be asking what’s behind those local portals as part of a community history project. And they will be writing their own fairy tales inspired by their own environment. “It will be fun to see what characteristics they give their heroes and heroines,” says Dow.

Allison and Dow found more connections between their community and some of the places they visited. Recent flooding in Tuscany and rising sea levels in Venice are probably related to the same climate issues that made Irene so devastating in New England. “We really are all connected,” Allison observes.

“It was the flood in Moretown that helped show us that our treasures are our people and our stories and that we need to preserve and protect what’s local,” says Dow. “That’s what makes us unique.”

**[Maribeth Dann](#) and [Nicole Buschmann](#)** experienced similar insights about connectedness and community in their trip to Ghana.

The pair teach middle grades gifted and reading classes and high school/dual credit biology and anatomy, respectively, at Hermann High School in Missouri. They traveled deep into rural Ghana, backpacking, taking canoe trips, and riding in local *tro tros* (small vans) and buses.

“We wanted to experience different ecosystems,” says Dann describing their travels on the Volta River, in the savannah, along the coast in rainforest and wetlands, and a visit to Ghana’s highest mountain.

“It was thrilling and a little scary,” says Buschmann of their trip in dugout canoes up the Black Volta River to a

hippopotamus sanctuary. "It was so different to see animals in their natural habitats, just being themselves. It is such a beautiful environment."

In addition to hippos, they saw baboons, elephants, water buffalo, antelope, and monkeys. They were warmly received in villages and at a rural elementary school, and they immersed themselves in one of Africa's largest open-air markets, where 10,000 vendors sold everything imaginable, including pottery, beading, basketry, and batik.

"Human life emerged from Ghana," says Buschmann. "To be in that place is indescribable."



*Nicole Buschmann and Maribeth Dann in Ghana*



*Hermann High student using a clinometer to take measurements in a local wooded area*

Like Costa Rica, Ghana has taken steps to preserve unique ecosystems and has designated large tracts as national parks and sanctuaries. But the effects of climate change are serious. "Many people are farmers, and the rains aren't coming like they were. People feel guilty about cutting a small amount of firewood," says Buschmann. "But that's not the real problem; the bigger problems are things going on in other parts of the world. It puts a different filter on how you view things."

Dann and Buschmann have transformed their experiences back to their students in Hermann by having students observe, measure, study, discover, and document their own local environment. "The students are much more engaged," says Buschmann. Students are also testing the health of fish and doing timber surveys and soil samples with local landowners.

For all the excitement of their travels, Dann and Buschmann both say the most memorable event of their trip happened early in their time in Ghana. A young Hermann High graduate working in Ghana was with them in Accra, the capital city. They needed to get to the bus station, but weren't sure where it was. So their former student asked a young man on the street for directions.

"He didn't just tell us where it was, he walked us there, translated for us, negotiated our fee, and made sure we were on the bus before he left us," says Buschmann. "We soon learned that no matter what happened, someone would help us."

### **Welcome | The entire person**

Many students at North Wilkesboro School in North Carolina, where [Lynn Barber](#) teaches kindergarten, are learning English. Barber and her daughter [Kristi Day](#), who teaches first grade at Traphill Elementary (also in Wilkes County), traveled to Finland.

Finnish students, including recent immigrants just learning the language, are among the highest-scoring students on international assessments. Barber and Day wanted to learn what Finnish schools are doing to achieve such success.

While the pair found some similarities with American schools, they also noted key differences. "For one thing, teachers had complete autonomy as long as they stayed within the skeleton curriculum," says Barber. "There's no prescribed pacing guide, and teachers in the school work together to decide what approaches are best for their students."

Teachers also stay with the same group of students for more than one year, sometimes for several years. "Teachers really build relationships with the kids. They don't have to



*Kristi Day and Lynn Barber at the Sibelius Monument honoring Finland's most noted composer*

spend time getting to know a new group every year," adds Day. "Parents even get upset if their children are not with the same teacher for several years."



*Classroom at an elementary school in Espoo, Finland*

Academic classes in elementary school are hands-on, community-oriented, and last only a few hours. The rest of the day teachers collaborate while students are involved in arts activities and athletics.

"It's very focused on each child as a whole person," says Barber. "They ask, 'what does this child need?' and then they provide it. At the elementary level, education is all about learning to learn."

This educational approach is the context for programs for students learning Finnish. "Students who don't know Finnish yet are in their own ungraded classes, limited to 10 students. The teachers don't worry about the subject content," Barber explains. "They are focused on learning the language and school culture."

These students do many of activities that other students do, creating a leaf collection, for example. In the process, they are learning how to learn, building friendships, experiencing what is expected of them in school—and learning Finnish.

"The typical student is ready for the regular classroom in three to twelve months," says Barber. "Then they go into the class with their age peers and become part of the group learning to learn. It's a very welcoming environment."

### **Sharing a meal**

[Selena Montgomery](#) and colleague [Delceina Layne](#) felt so welcomed in the Vermont schools they visited en route to Canada that they returned to Vermont on their way home.

"They chose their destinations for some of the same reasons that Barber and Day were interested in Finland. Montgomery and Layne teach at North Mitchell Elementary in southwest Georgia. Diversity in their school has increased dramatically in recent years, primarily as families from Mexico and Central America have moved to the community for jobs in the agricultural sector.

Montgomery and Layne wanted to learn from schools successfully meeting diversity and teaching language. So they headed to Montreal, Canada where schools have a history of working with diverse populations and to Burlington, Vermont, where the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program is located.



*Hunt Middle School garden, Vermont*

Montgomery and Layne had another goal as well. North Mitchell Elementary has recently started a school garden with an emphasis on healthy living. As fourth and fifth grade teachers, the pair wanted to learn from schools successfully integrating gardening, foods, nutrition, and health into their curriculum.

"When you have rural kids coming in at five or six with high blood pressure, diabetes, buying adult clothes and cutting off the legs, you have ask: How did we get here?" says Montgomery.

While she and Layne enjoyed and learned during their time in Canada, it was the nine Vermont schools they visited that captivated their imaginations.

"It's just beautiful how they embrace the different nationalities of their students," Montgomery says.

"When you walk into the school, you see an artwork depicting each of the home countries of all the students," she says. Sometimes the art—stained glass collages, quilts, bottle cap sculptures—was created by students and sometimes by local artists working in the school.

The school cafeterias were true social and learning hubs. Flags from each nation hung from the ceiling. "The cafeteria had two lines, one with American cuisine and one with international foods; students could choose

whatever they wanted that day," Montgomery explains.

The cafeterias also held food-tasting events and conducted surveys of student preferences. "The students have a real sense of ownership and feeling that their backgrounds and cultures matter," says Montgomery. In addition, most of the foods served were grown in the school garden or purchased from local farmers and made fresh in the school cafeteria.



*Student's colorful lunch plate featuring locally grown produce, Vermont*

"The kids loved it," says Montgomery. "Their plates were so colorful, it shocked me. At one school, a five-year-old said to me, 'oh, I hope the romaine lettuce is ready,' and then she picked leaves right out of the garden and began eating them. It was beautiful. One school had an outdoor classroom with a homemade bread maker. It was gorgeous."

The schools also hosted harvest suppers serving vegetables and other dishes, many of which were provided by families. They sent food home with parents and ran community Meals-On-Wheels programs out of the school cafeterias.

The school gardens and greenhouses are integrated in the schools' curricula and students do much of the work. The curricula, in turn, is integrated with the community—academically, socially, and culturally—so parents and community are very immersed in the life of the school, often volunteering hours of time every week.

"It made students feel pride," says Montgomery. "It's a domino effect, for parents and everyone else. It carries through to what people do every day. We never heard, 'that's not my job,' or 'I don't have time.' "

Montgomery says of their two weeks in Vermont: "We felt like we were part of the family. We were really working hard, eight to five, and we loved it."

North Mitchell Elementary wants to cultivate a sense of family for all their students. "We want our students to be able to say: 'I'm from Mexico, and this is my family, too,'" says Montgomery.

A big part of that effort will be cultivating their garden and their community connections.

"Sitting down together and having a good meal and conversation, that's really it," says Montgomery.

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**Application deadline for 2014 Global Teacher Fellows is January 30, 2014.** Learn how to apply here: [www.globalteacherfellowship.ruraledu.org/apply.html](http://www.globalteacherfellowship.ruraledu.org/apply.html).

**Learn more about the Global Teacher Fellowship at** [www.globalteacherfellowship.ruraledu.org/index.html](http://www.globalteacherfellowship.ruraledu.org/index.html)

## Tragedies Reflect Patterns in School Violence

The school shooting in Sparks, Nevada bears many of the hallmarks of mass event school violence in the U.S.: a very young shooter, a teacher whose heroic actions helped protect nearby students, and easy access by the shooter to a gun.

The 12-year-old Sparks Middle School student wounded two classmates and killed teacher Mike Landsberry before fatally shooting himself. Landsberry had tried to persuade the boy to put the gun down enabling many nearby students to run to safety.

In the fraught aftermath of such events, it is difficult to determine whether the student had experienced

bullying or other social difficulties at school. Some [reports](#) indicate he was shouting things like: "Why are you laughing at me?" Evidence available at this time does not seem to suggest the boy sought out individual victims.

Many districts across the country, including Wahoe County Schools where Sparks Middle is located, have implemented anti-bullying programs. These programs have emerged, in part, in response to a widely held idea that some school shooters are reacting to personal experiences of bullying, sometimes associated with a culture of bullying in the school.

Specific events at Sparks Middle School underscore the challenges of addressing the problem, especially for young adolescents. Authorities are looking into an anti-bullying video reportedly shown at the school earlier this month. The video is said to depict a bullied student threatening others with a gun.

The murder of Colleen Ritzer, who taught at Danvers High School in Massachusetts, reflects a more common form of deadly school violence: an incident in which one or two people are killed in an act that is not part of a mass violence attack.

Authorities, citing video surveillance and other evidence, have charged a 14-year-old student in the stabbing death. The 9th grader has pleaded not guilty. Ritzer had provided after-school tutoring to the student on the day of the murder.

At the time of this article, there were no reports of serious mental health issues, misconduct, or family difficulties for either student.

### **Patterns in deadly school violence**

The tragedies in Sparks and Danvers are the latest incidents in a history of deadly violence in U.S. schools. In March, the Rural Trust released the report, [Violence in U.S. K–12 Schools, 1974–2013: Patterns in Deadly Incidents and Mass Threat](#), which explores 800 incidents. (Download the pdf [here](#).)

The report found 80 incidents it defines as "mass violence events." Those incidents had three or more victims (injuries, deaths, suicide); or, the incident targeted victims randomly, had the potential to kill or inflict serious harm on multiple victims, *and* injured at least one person. The Sparks tragedy is the 81st incident of mass event violence. Those incidents have now claimed 157 lives.

The report found that most perpetrators of mass event violence in schools were students (56%), with 6% of perpetrators aged 13 or younger. (Age was unreported in another 14% of incidents.) Guns accounted for 99% of deaths in these incidents. Known histories of mental health problems and/or experiences of bullying or abuse among perpetrators indicate these issues were a factor in some, but not all, of the incidents.

Mass event violence, however, accounts for only about 25% of violent deaths in school. *Violence in U.S. K–12 Schools* found that nearly three times as many people, some 450 individuals, died in incidents the report defines as "single events." These incidents include suicides and homicides that targeted one or two individuals and occurred during school hours on campus, buses, or at school events. Incidents in which one person dies at school are more difficult to track in media accounts than are mass violence incidents and are likely undercounted in the report.

Students and teens were the most common perpetrators (77%) in "single event" incidents in schools, with 33% of perpetrators aged 15 or younger. Stabbings accounted for 20% of deaths; gunshots accounted for 68%, and beatings accounted for 12%.

In August, a 20-year-old opened fire on a suburban Atlanta (Decatur) elementary school, prompting police fire in response. No one was injured after a school staff member talked the shooter into putting down his gun.

### **Read more:**

Sparks, Nevada

- [www.cnn.com/2013/10/22/justice/nevada-middle-school-shooting/](http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/22/justice/nevada-middle-school-shooting/)
- [www.cnn.com/2013/10/24/justice/nevada-school-shooting-survivor/](http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/24/justice/nevada-school-shooting-survivor/)
- <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/nev-school-shooting-probe-includes-bullying-video-20676322>
- [www.foxnews.com/us/2013/10/24/nevada-school-shooting-probe-looks-at-bullying-video/](http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/10/24/nevada-school-shooting-probe-looks-at-bullying-video/)
- [www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/26/jose-reyes-shooter-loner\\_n\\_4165899.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/26/jose-reyes-shooter-loner_n_4165899.html)

Danvers, Massachusetts

- <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-10-24/news/sns-rt-us-usa-massachusetts-shooting->

- [20131023\\_1\\_math-teacher-12-year-old-student-14-year-old-high-school-student](http://20131023_1_math-teacher-12-year-old-student-14-year-old-high-school-student)
- [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/10/23/danvers-teacher-dead/3169235/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/10/23/danvers-teacher-dead/3169235/)
- [www.nydailynews.com/news/national/teen-stayed-final-bell-danvers-high-school-teacher-allegedly-killing-bathroom-article-1.1496308](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/teen-stayed-final-bell-danvers-high-school-teacher-allegedly-killing-bathroom-article-1.1496308)
- [www.nydailynews.com/news/national/uncle-teen-charged-killing-danvers-high-school-teacher-skeptical-charges-article-1.1497330](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/uncle-teen-charged-killing-danvers-high-school-teacher-skeptical-charges-article-1.1497330)

Taft, California

- [www.nydailynews.com/news/national/teen-opened-fire-california-high-school-adult-article-1.1239975](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/teen-opened-fire-california-high-school-adult-article-1.1239975)

Decatur, Georgia

- [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/20/qa-school-gunfire-dekalb/2677507/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/20/qa-school-gunfire-dekalb/2677507/)

## Effective Discipline Key to Reducing Student and Teacher Dropout Rates

September 28th through October 5th marked the National Week of Action Against School Pushout, an event coordinated by the [Dignity in Schools Campaign](#). Events in at least 40 cities and towns attracted thousands of supporters working to end the school-to-prison pipeline and promote positive alternatives for improving school safety and climate, academics, and discipline.

As part of those events, South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center released the report, [Reducing Student and Teacher Dropout Rates in South Carolina: Effective Discipline for Student Success](#). The report promotes a research-based approach to school discipline that improves teacher satisfaction as well as academic performance.

South Carolina's out-of-school suspension rate of 14.78% is one of the nation's highest. Zero tolerance policies in many districts have not only excluded students from school, but forced many students into the juvenile justice system for minor non-criminal misbehavior. For example, in 2011–12, more than 1,200 students were in juvenile justice courts for minor misbehavior, many of them referred under the state's "disturbing schools" sanction. Their offenses included such activities as running in hallways and "acting obnoxiously."

The report explores the implications of ineffective and unfairly administered discipline policies on particular groups of students. For example, students in the state's juvenile justice school district are three times more likely to be diagnosed with a disability than students in regular schools.

Exclusionary and ineffective discipline has a demonstrated impact on a student's likelihood of dropping out of school. The report ties the state's high suspension rate to its very low graduation rate. Only 61.7% students graduated in 2008–09, ranking South Carolina 47th in the nation. The report also notes the relationship between ineffective school discipline approaches and high rates of teacher turnover.

As an alternative to current practices, *Reducing Student and Teacher Dropout Rates in South Carolina* recommends the implementation of [School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\)](#) in all schools. The program has been shown to transform the school environment by teaching, modeling, and rewarding good behavior. Students who misbehave receive reminders and other corrective actions. They may also be required to take action to redress negative outcomes of their behavior. More intensive supports and interventions are provided for students whose difficult behavior limits their academic and social success. The results are dramatic reductions in suspensions, expulsions, and arrests; safer schools; and improved academic outcomes.

The report includes compelling stories of individual students and how the PBIS program has worked in their schools; a list of resources; and action recommendations for parents and community, school staff and administrators, and policymakers.

[Reducing Student and Teacher Dropout Rates in South Carolina: Effective Discipline for Student Success](#) was written by Amanda Adler with funding from the Southern Poverty Law Center. Adler is a staff attorney at [South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center](#) and a consultant with the Rural Trust.

For more information contact Amanda Adler at [amanda.adler@scjustice.org](mailto:amanda.adler@scjustice.org) or (803) 779-1113, ext. 108.

**Read more:**

Download the document:

- <http://scjusticewatch.org/2013/10/03/new-sc-appleseed-publication-promotes-blueprint-for-reducing-south-carolinas-school-dropout-rate/>

News coverage of the report:

- [www.greenvilleonline.com/article/20131004/NEWS/310040042/](http://www.greenvilleonline.com/article/20131004/NEWS/310040042/)

Read more about the Dignity in Schools Campaign and the 2013 National Week of Action Against School Pushout

- [www.dignityinschools.org/](http://www.dignityinschools.org/)

Read more from the October 2013 [Rural Policy Matters](#).

## **New Reports Address Important Issues for Student and Community Well-Being**

### **Rural dropout prevention**

In [Dropout Prevention: Challenges and Opportunities in Rural Settings](#), Allan Porowski and Caitlin Howley provide an overview of key issues affecting rural high school graduation rates with a focus on how rural communities can leverage their own strengths to reduce the likelihood that students will leave school early.

The [ICF International](#) white paper identifies specific challenges often faced by rural schools—limited funding, declining enrollment, very long bus rides, qualified professional staff. It also suggests several positive characteristics—school community collaboration, family engagement, adult mentors/advocates—as resources for keeping vulnerable students in school through graduation.

The paper notes that for some rural students “the choice to complete high school and attend college is also a choice to move away from home permanently.” Students who want to remain in their home communities need support to understand how high school completion will provide them with more life choices. The paper also notes the dearth of rural-specific research to support evidence-based programs in rural schools.

You can read the report at [www.icfi.com/insights/white-papers/2013/dropout-prevention-challenges-opportunities-rural-settings](http://www.icfi.com/insights/white-papers/2013/dropout-prevention-challenges-opportunities-rural-settings).

### **Full service community schools**

Two reports from the [Children’s Aid Society](#) offer a compelling case for the full-service community school model. Community schools provide coordinated social, health, and educational services to children and their families and are tailored to local circumstances. They are founded in the idea that focusing on the strengths of the community as well as the education of children can create a “web of support” for the optimal development of the community’s children.

[Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools: A Practical Guide](#) and [Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools: A Case Study](#), both authored by Laura Martinez and Cheryl D. Hayes, document the development and application of a Social Return on Investment method for determining the economic value of the community school model.

The case study finds that each dollar invested in the case study’s elementary school delivered \$10.30 in social value. In the case study’s high school, each dollar invested delivered \$14.80 in social value.

While these values are specifically calculated for the very urban context of the case study schools, the dramatic results underscore the benefit to children of wise investments that strengthen individual life opportunities as well as the overall well-being of local communities.

### **Learn more about the Community School model:**

*The Rural Solution: How Community Schools Can Reinvigorate Rural Education*, Doris Terry Williams, Rural School and Community Trust: [www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2572](http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2572)

- [www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2010/09/22/8376/the-rural-solution/](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2010/09/22/8376/the-rural-solution/)

Coalition for Community Schools

- [www.communityschools.org/](http://www.communityschools.org/)

National Center for Community Schools

- <http://nationalcenterforcommunityschools.childrengovernment.org/>

Communities in Schools

- [www.communitiesinschools.org/](http://www.communitiesinschools.org/)

Federation for Community Schools

- [www.ilcommunityschools.org/](http://www.ilcommunityschools.org/)

U.S. Department of Education Full Service Community Schools program

- <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/communityschools/contacts.html>

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***More from the Rural Trust***

[RPM Special Edition  
on School Violence](#)

[Consolidation  
Fight-Back Toolkit](#)

[Global Teacher  
Fellowship](#)



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*Rural Policy Matters* is a monthly newsletter which provides news of interest to citizens and community groups working on state-level policy issues affecting rural schools. For subscription information visit [www.ruraledu.org/getrpm.html](http://www.ruraledu.org/getrpm.html).

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