

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Attending
Rural and Urban Middle Schools

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

One room and a potbelly stove, kids of all grades sharing books, supervised by a single teacher. These are the images one might conjure up when thinking of a small rural school. Some of these schools still exist, but they are rare. The history of rural schools starts with many children not having schools close enough to attend. In the 1930's, many rural students stopped going to school around the 8th grade. One reason for them to not continue their education was the lack of nearby secondary schools. The second was survival, children were needed to do household chores, help out on the farm, and raise their siblings. In these times it was difficult to sacrifice a helping hand to allow children to attend high school. During the 1950's, it became more common for rural students to graduate from high school. Schools were being built closer to rural students' homes and transportation to these schools had become available. In reality, since then small rural schools have evolved into modern educational places. Although rural schools have in general improved academic achievement and curriculum alongside with urban schools, they often are lacking in technology access and qualified teachers.

While farming used to be a proud way of life, families in rural communities no longer rely on farming as their sole form of income. The number of full-time farmers in rural communities is low. It is reported that only 43,120 people out of 134,354,250 people in the U.S. labor force are employed as full-time farmers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008).

Children attending rural schools face challenges of higher poverty than those attending urban schools. "Nearly one in three of America's school-aged children attend

public schools in rural areas or small towns, and more than one in six go to school in the very smallest communities. These children, their schools, and their communities matter” (Beeson & Strange, 2003, p.1).

Statement of the Problem

Debates about education and achievement in rural schools being less than equal to those of urban schools have been going on for some time. This debate is a tug-of-war subject. Some believe that education in rural schools is better than education in urban schools while others disagree. For those who believe an urban education is better, “recent research does not provide clear evidence that rural schools are inferior to urban schools,” and “analysis reveals that rural schools achieve mean annual gains in performance that equal or better their urban counterparts” (Bylund & Reeves, 2005, p. 360). This Master’s Research Project takes an in-depth look at this debate and reviews pertinent data to further address the research questions listed next.

Research Questions

1. According to the research, what are the advantages and disadvantages of rural middle schools?
2. According to the research, what are the advantages and disadvantages of urban middle schools?
3. Do students in rural middle schools receive an equal quality education to students in urban middle schools?

Purpose/Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine whether rural middle schools and urban middle schools provide an equal quality education to their students. For many years, the

discussion about whether rural schools provide an education of equal quality to urban schools has been a topic that many people in the education field, as well as parents and students, have been disputing. There may always be a difference of opinion. However, this study seeks to present a deeper research-driven understanding of the multiple viewpoints.

Limitations

Limitations of this study may result from this author's personal bias as well as that of prior research studies. This paper is also limited to research done previously and a lack of available studies relevant to this topic.

Definition of Terms

Urban: All territory, population, and housing units located within urban areas and urban clusters consisting of one or more block groups or census blocks, each with a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile, surrounding block groups and census blocks, each with a population density of at least 500 people per square mile, and less densely settled blocks that form enclaves or indentations or are used to connect discontinuous areas with qualifying densities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007, p. A-22).

Rural: Rural consists of all territory, population, and housing units located outside of urbanized areas and urban clusters. Geographic entities, such as metropolitan areas, counties, minor civil divisions, and places territory, population, and housing units (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007, p. A-22).

Suburban/metropolitan: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with a population of 250,000 or more. Typically a core area such as a central city

along with the counties economically and socially connected to it. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005)

Middle School: A school for young adolescents, ages 10-15, that is characterized by a culture that includes: educators who value working with this age group and are prepared to do so; courageous, collaborative leadership; a shared vision that guides decisions; an inviting, supportive, and safe environment; high expectations for every member of the learning community; students and teachers engaged in active learning, an adult advocate for every student; and school-initiated family and community partnerships. Therefore an exemplar middle school provides: curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory; multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to their diversity; assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning; organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning school-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety; and multifaceted guidance and support services (NMSA, 2003).

Methodology

This paper constitutes a review of the current research on rural middle schools and urban middle schools. The literature was accessed through a key word search of ALICE, a search engine of the Ohio University's library system. Additional information was obtained through the following: Google Scholar, the Ohio Department of Education website, National Middle School Association website, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) documents, and *This We Believe*. Keywords that were used in the search included: rural, urban, education, middle school, curriculum, qualified teachers,

accountability, technology, achievement, and community. Information for the years 1998-2009 was used for this paper.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One included an introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, limitations, definition of terms, methodology, and organization of the study. Chapter Two includes a review of the research literature on the importance of achievement in middle schools, accountability in schools, technology in the classrooms, curriculum, qualified teachers, the influence of community involvement in schools, and the advantages and disadvantages of attending rural as well as urban middle schools. Chapter Three offers an analysis of the research literature based upon: the importance of achievement in middle schools, accountability in schools, technology in the classrooms, curriculum, qualified teachers, the influence of community involvement on schools, and advantages and disadvantages of attending rural as well as urban middle schools. Chapter Four includes a summary of the study, conclusions to the three research questions, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Importance of Achievement in Middle Schools

Student success in rural and urban middle schools is essential for a healthy and well functioning society. For students to succeed in high school, college and eventually in the workforce the middle school years are critical. However, there are multiple challenges facing students during this time. Middle schools need support, appreciation and participation to build successful educational programs. Consequently, a high quality middle school education should be of the highest priority to everyone, not just parents and teachers. In fact, “the importance of middle level education can never be overestimated” (NMSA, 2003, p.35).

Legislators have realized the importance of academic achievement in middle school and as a result have mandated state and national tests. While these tests can measure academic performance, the ultimate determinant of achievement is whether or not students connect with learning. In order to connect with learning students have to accept education as a lifelong process that can provide them with unlimited opportunities. “Achieving high academic performance for every student requires more than just raising standards or gaining an adequate score on a standardized test. It means empowering students to learn, to become intellectually engaged, and to behave as responsible citizens” (NMSA, 2003, p.15).

Students not only need to be empowered to learn, they must be empowered to want to learn. Desire still plays a great role in education. The simple desire to learn

creates a much greater possibility for learning to occur. Unfortunately, that desire can greatly diminish in the middle school. “Results suggest a significant decline in overall motivation to reading during the middle school years for students in urban schools” (Schlakman & Unrau, 2006, p.81). This decline makes it that much more important for everyone to support students and promote the importance of education in the middle school.

To promote the importance of achievement in middle schools, teachers need to determine the students' academic levels and challenge them from that point. “Continuous, authentic and appropriate assessment and evaluation measures provide evidence about every student’s learning progress” (NMSA, 2003, p. 27). Although teachers must do their part to promote learning; at some point, students still must embrace learning. They must want to learn or at least believe enough in the importance of learning to put effort into their schooling. Otherwise, students will turn off to education and be left behind. To promote this idea to students, teachers should take into consideration the interests of the class and work with them to make a plan of action. In fact, “students should have opportunities to set personal goals, chart their individual growth, and reflect on their progress in achieving knowledge, skill, and behavioral objectives of education” (NMSA, 2003, p.27).

Accountability

Recently legislation has been passed to revamp our national educational system. Among that legislation, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) created many new requirements for teachers and placed the focus on all students being able to learn. This has created a much greater sense of accountability in our system of education. Accountability has

become a major focus in schools today. In Ohio, for example, each school is given an annual report card showing the progress or lack of progress for each student's achievement on state test. To take it a step further, many states have created real consequences for schools that do not show adequate progress. As a result, schools have implemented new training to help teachers prepare students for achievement tests. This training aligns curriculum, focuses on best practices for teaching and creates remedial work for students that need the extra help. However, this also fosters a danger of teaching to the test when so much time, energy and resources are placed on preparing for these tests. (Zavadsky, 2006, p.3) Therefore, when planning curriculum, teachers should not solely teach to the test, rather teachers need to focus on the depth of the curriculum as well.

Curriculum

Another tool that states use to measure student achievement is curriculum. "Curriculum is the primary vehicle for achieving goals and objectives of a school" (NMSA, 2003, p.19). Curriculum is everything that goes into education "it includes those specific classes designed to advance skills and knowledge as well as school-wide services and programs. The curriculum of a successful middle level school must be relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory, from both the student's as well as the teacher's perspective" (NMSA, 2003, p.19). When teachers "fashion a substantive curriculum and pace from learning to accomplish individual levels of understanding and development" (NMSA, 2003, p.15) everyone reaps the rewards. A challenging curriculum leads to a winning achievement.

Curriculum today “must respond to more demands than ever, including newer state and federal standards. However, that does not mean that curriculum should be standardized or uninspired. Curriculum that meets the needs of young adolescents is based on criteria of high quality that provide direction for what young adolescents should know and be able to do and help them achieve the attitudes and behaviors needed for a full, productive, and satisfying life” (NMSA, 2003, p.24).

Curriculum and how it is implemented in schools is an extremely complex and controversial topic. The amount of information that compares curriculum, “what is happening in a school,” between rural and urban schools is limited and “very limited constructive suggestions have been made regarding a conceptual basis for an effective curriculum design” (DiVirgilio, 2001, p.78). Even though there have been few suggestions made for how to develop an effective curriculum, this task is possible. As discussed later, rural schools do have many disadvantages. However, one of their greatest advantages is community involvement, which has a positive effect on student achievement. “Despite the challenges they face, rural schools present many lessons for meeting and exceeding state standards when they develop high-quality, culturally relevant curriculums that connect schools and community” (Williams, 2003, p.69).

Curriculum needs to be designed for each school so that it is as unique as the students. It should be interesting and relevant to both the students and teachers. Interested teachers feel better about their teaching and consequently make learning more fun and engaging for their students. While students are engaged, learning takes places. “Pupils in rural schools need a developmental curriculum to meet personal, interest, and

purpose motivations ...whereby they may individually achieve optimally” (Ediger, 2000, p.280).

Assessments need to be made to ensure that learning is being achieved. The concentration of that assessment should be on the content of the school’s curriculum. Content in curriculum is vital because it “is the vehicle through which the learner develops his skills. It also serves the purpose of transmitting knowledge considered important by society, the society which invests in schools and education” (DiVirgilio, 2001, p.79). The needs of what the community and the state expect should be a part of a continually developing curriculum.

Qualified Teachers

Schools also have to keep up to date with qualified teachers. Rural and urban schools have a hard time getting and retaining qualified teachers. “Both urban and rural schools have particular difficulty in recruiting and offering some forms of staff development” (Domenech, 2006, p.29). A portion of this is due to salary and teaching conditions. For example, Domenech (2006) found that, “suburban teachers were paid \$7,500 more than rural teachers and \$3,700 more than urban teachers. Rural teachers were also less likely to receive health insurance and other fringe benefits. In addition, both urban and rural teachers’ environments discourage some potential applicants” (p.29).

Some schools have teachers in the classroom who are not fully qualified for the position. The reason for this may be partly due to how NCLB defines “highly qualified.” “The *No Child Left Behind* legislation, however, defines teacher quality almost solely in terms of content knowledge. It views teachers as highly qualified only if they have a

major, a master's degree, or have passed a test in the core subject areas in which they teach. On average, rural teachers earn 13.4 percent less than their nonrural counterparts" (Williams, 2003, p.67). Studies suggest that rural schools have teachers that are "not as well educated as their peers, with 37 percent holding master's degrees versus 44 percent in central cities and 47 percent in ... urban-fringed schools" (Domenech, 2006, p.29).

Students attending rural schools, just like those of urban schools, deserve qualified teachers. There is a "lack of teacher education programs and licensure that focus on the middle school level, the majority of young adolescents are taught by teachers who prepared for a career as an elementary or high school teacher" (NCES, 2006, p.8). Students' achievement and teacher quality go hand in hand in most cases. "Educators need specific teacher preparation before they enter middle level classrooms and continuous professional development as they pursue their career" (NMSA, 2003, p.9).

Teachers can create a safe learning environment where each student is valued. However, teachers cannot control exterior setbacks. It has been found that some remote schools had lower achievement than urban schools or even other rural schools. The cause was students' background and socioeconomic status and "the [minimal] chances that a school or a teacher can change student effects" (Young, 1998, p.412). Teachers have to realize this and stay motivated to help students to do their best.

Technology

The importance of technology in schools cannot be over emphasized, as technology becomes more and more a part of each of our lives. Everyday a new technology is invented. That very technology becomes commonplace in a short time. As

time goes on it develops into a necessary part of our lives and eventually a necessary part of our work. For example, just a few years ago a BlackBerry was unknown. Today, it is a common device used by many people in their daily work. “Technology can enhance the amount of information that students might be exposed to...and can be of real help in the extent to which it can facilitate inquiry on the part of students and teachers” (Theobald, 1997, p.129). For students to be successful they must be able to use these new technologies as well as the next new technology that will come out tomorrow.

Fortunately, many middle school students are far more aware and adept at the use of technology than their grownup counterparts. The need for access and understanding of technology is far more important to them than it was to our ancestors or even to us. Every available opportunity to learn and utilize technology must be provided to the students. If they are uncomfortable with new technology, this can be difficult for some teachers.

Encouragingly, states have a concerted effort to promote technology with most mandating legislation to teach technology in schools. In fact, 48 states have included a special section for technology in their education standards according to *A Digital Decade* completed by the *EPE (Editorial Projects in Education) Research Center*. In this report 49.5 % of the classrooms across the United States had computer access with a higher percentage of 77 % of computer labs and media centers having student access to computers. This translated into about 3.8 students per computer and 3.4 students per high-speed Internet connection. (EPE Research Center, 2007)

Furthermore, high poverty schools and overall averages in the Ohio were very comparable in available computers per student with averages listed at 3.6 students per

computer for high poverty schools and 3.5 students per computers for all schools. Therefore, technology is available equally regardless of an urban or rural setting.

Unfortunately, some rural schools still find it difficult to provide the latest technological trends that students need to excel in school. This technology is vitally important as it provides vast opportunities for higher level processing of information. “Technology should be used to advance learning and should be available to every student. Technology can develop higher-order thinking skills and provide the most current information from many sources, enabling teachers and students to interact with real world resources in unprecedented ways. Properly used, technology also helps students to develop personal responsibility and independence and prepares them for contemporary life” (NMSA, 2003, p.26). Technology aids students in personal and educational growth. In poverty-ridden schools this technology provides opportunities that would be financially impossible otherwise.

In rural communities the finances and the opportunities are not always readily available, but that situation is slowly changing. “Education reforms require schools to accommodate new teaching and learning styles which includes providing laboratory classrooms, flexible instruction areas that can facilitate small-group, large-group, and multiage instruction, and multimedia centers that offer a variety of technological resources. Rural schools, however, face a broad array of facility upgrades: 37 percent have inadequate science laboratory facilities. Forty percent have inadequate space for large-group instruction, and 13 percent report an inadequate library/media center” (Deweese, 1999, p.2).

“New technologies and increasing access to distance learning, telecommuting, and e-commerce show promise for changing power dynamics and providing new opportunities in distressed rural communities” (Carter, 1999, p.5). These positive experiences for rural students are demonstrated through the increase in advanced technology. Students need a reason to come to school every day. Rural students, like urban students, need rewards and a challenging curriculum. Many students do not see the reason to attend and therefore, miss many days of school a year. These rewards might be the hood needed to catch these students. “It’s a different world for kids in rural schools who face problems many of us never think about. The technology helps to combat the district’s truancy problem by making school more interesting and fun for students. Students are more engaged in learning, excited about school and have a greater awareness of the larger world. Teachers also use the Internet in a variety of ways to provide hands-on learning opportunities for students” (THE Journal, 2002, p.52).

Community Involvement

“While urban and rural areas share many of the same school facility problems, rural districts tend to have several distinguishing characteristics. For example, rural districts usually serve smaller close-knit communities. The school plays an important role in many rural communities and can be a community center and symbol of community pride” (Deweese, 1999, p.2).

Rural schools are more than just schools for students to attend. They are social and cultural centers for the community. “The greatest promise for the survival and success of rural schools may be their own willingness to re-create themselves into new

kinds of institutions that dissolve the boundaries between school and community, ensuring that facilities and programs serve the entire community” (Williams, 2003, p.70).

In many instances these schools are not part of the community, they are the community. These schools have the unique ability to transform communities into great learning centers that encompass not only the building, but the entire community. They provide a place for traditions to stay alive and a place where great memories will never grow old. In spirit, rural schools “...play an important role in many rural communities and can be a community center and symbol of community pride” (Deweese, 1999, p.2).

Students in rural schools often have advantages that are not available to urban students. They come from farm families and consequently they have opportunities to participate in *Future Farmers of America* (FFA) and *4-H* as well as *Industrial Arts* and *Industrial Technology* classes that provide them with real world experience that they can use immediately. These opportunities provide great lessons in leadership and responsibility that have lifelong applications. “Rural pupils can have numerous chances for success in life due to having learned responsibility and purpose in life, through public school education, *FFA* and *4-H*, and religious organizations” (Ediger, 2000, p.281).

Small communities are holding tight to tradition and values.

Rural schools play an important part in their community. “Schools do not presume to educate children alone. In today’s society, genuine family and community involvement are fundamental components of successful schools for young adolescents” (NMSA, 2003, p.18). Parents need to realize their importance and continue to be involved in their child’s education. “Research studies clearly link the involvement of

both family and other adults in the community with higher levels of student achievement, improved student behavior, and greater overall support for schools” (NMSA, 2003, p.18).

Often, teachers in rural schools must convince students to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented to them. “It is reported that socioeconomic status of rural youth plays an important part in aspirations” (Michayluk & Randhawa, 1975, p.268).

Similar problems exist in urban schools, but for different reasons. Gangs, drugs and other criminal issues are prevalent in certain areas. The crime rate for urban areas is higher than those for rural areas. “Repeatedly a strong association is found between failing in school and delinquent behavior. Poor grades, low achievement, retention in grade, failure to attain basic skills... all contribute to students’ dislike for and poor attitude toward school. Students with these difficulties are more likely to demonstrate delinquent behaviors” (Fullwood, Gates, Pancake, & Schroth, 2001, p.5).

In both urban and rural schools there are many variables such as job security and family stability that affect student education. Employment and changes in family structure/life affect students’ behavior and academic achievement at school. “Formal educational institutions assumed a function that in previous history was primarily a function of the family. Changes in the home and family structures have a significant impact on the education of children and youths in schools” (Fullwood et al., 2001, p.5). Many times due to parents who are unavailable, sometimes due to choice and sometimes due to circumstances, schools become the sole provider of instruction in moral and ethics. Unfortunately, this creates a barrier for students and teachers alike to overcome.

Rural and Urban Schools

Rural and urban schools are characterized by unique strengths and weaknesses. “Rural and urban schools are much the same when it comes to resources and learning environments” (EQR, 2003, p.45). Yet there are so many variables that affect student achievement and often those variables are directly related to whether a school is considered a rural or an urban school. Therefore we will look at the key advantages and disadvantages that each type of school provides.

Advantages of Rural Schools

One of the greatest advantages of rural schools is the tendency for smaller classes. Due to population density, class size is generally more manageable for teachers. Often teachers are able to spend more time with individual students and provide more assistance to students having difficulties, which result in higher student achievement. “When looking at pupil/teacher ratio it was found that achievement was greater in smaller schools with smaller classes” (Greenwald, Hedges & Laine, 1996, p.369).

New York City schools saw great benefits in reducing class sizes in some of their schools. In fact, “during the Clinton administration, the Department of Education championed small schools as an antidote to low student achievement and school safety problems” (Duke & Trautvetter, 2001, p.1). The results were amazing. “As a result of being subdivided into houses, New York City’s Dewitt Clinton High School, for example, went from being one of America’s largest and most troubled high schools to one of President Clinton’s 96 outstanding high schools” (Duke & Trautvetter, 2001, p.2).

The results in New York were impressive across the board. “Dewitt Clinton raised average daily attendance by over 17 percent, reduced the dropout rate by 8 ½ percent, and increased the on-time graduation rate by almost 50 percent. Between 1993 and 1998 enrollment in advanced courses jumped from 131 to 553 and the number of Regents exams that were passed rose from 1,311 to 3,228” (Duke & Trautvetter, 2001, p.2).

The results tend to show that smaller class sizes make a real and measurable difference, but why? Why do smaller classes work best? “First, teachers’ enthusiasm and satisfaction may be enhanced when there are fewer students to teach; this may be perceived by the students and influence their motivation for learning. Second, reduced class size may directly impact teacher-student interactions, allowing for more individual attention in particular; third, smaller classes may increase the extent to which individual pupils attend to and become involved in learning activities” (Achelles & Finn, 1990, p.575).

“To school personnel, small classes promise to facilitate increased student-teacher interaction, allow for thorough and continuous student evaluation, and provide greater flexibility in teaching strategy. Administratively, smaller classes reduce teachers’ responsibilities for paperwork and record keeping, allowing them to allocate more time to instructionally relevant activities. Under ideal circumstances, a small class may also minimize discipline problems because the teacher can more easily keep all students under a watchful eye” (Achelles & Finn, 1990, p.558).

To take the point a little farther we can look at other research that strengthens the importance of smaller class size for poverty ridden youth. “Researchers for the *Rural*

School and Community Trust looked at 13,000 schools in Georgia, Montana, Ohio, and Texas and found that smaller schools consistently outperformed larger schools. Perhaps more important, smaller schools posted higher scores on standardized tests than would have been predicted from their poverty levels alone. In other words, the negative effect of poverty is reduced in smaller schools” (Duke & Trautvetter, 2001, p.2). A child in poverty situations drastically needs extra support and encouragement and in these rural schools that is often easier to obtain.

Another key advantage is the availability of technology to students. In a smaller student population computer technology blooms. The more students are able to use technology the more comfortable and adept they become to that knowledge. Therefore it is important for students to have access to the latest technology. Rural schools are forging ahead with an emphasis on using technology in the classroom. Some studies have found, “a higher proportion of rural students than urban students used computers more than once a month at school” (EQR, 2003, p.45).

Disadvantages of Rural Schools

There are many advantages to attending rural schools; however, rural schools do have their disadvantages. Computer availability was rated higher in school; however, out of school was a different story. In one study “rural students were less likely to have access to computers and the Internet at home” (EQR, 2003, p.45). In today’s changing society, this creates a terrible handicap for those students. A second clear disadvantage of many rural schools is their distance from a nearby university or college. For many rural students travel to these schools is a distant journey. As a result, rural students often miss the opportunity to participate in summer, remedial and enrichment programs

provided by these educational institutions. These educational programs are very beneficial to students. University programs enhance learning and provide future opportunities but, because of the distance from their communities, rural students are frequently either unaware or unable to attend. “Most rural areas and small towns do not contain post-secondary educational institutions, and many cannot support a full array of occupational choices, so rural youth often need to leave their communities to pursue educational and work goals” (Demi, Jensen, McLaughlin, & Snyder, 2006, p.2).

The desire to attend higher education seems to be comparable in both urban and rural schools. “Both groups have high educational aspirations that include plans to attend either a four-year or community college. These high aspirations may be unrealistic as they are inconsistent with earlier studies that find actual educational attainment of rural youth to be lower than youth from urban areas” (Demi et al., 2006, p.2).

Advantages of Urban Schools

As with rural schools there are many advantages to attending urban schools. Perhaps the biggest advantage is described in the research of Michayluk & Randhawa (1975) who found that “urban residents are almost always better educated than rural residents regardless of sex, age, maturity, race or parentage. They found that rural pupils are characterized by poor educational achievement as compared with urban pupils” (p.268).

What is the reason for this gap in education? Research suggests the difference is not related to gender, age, race, maturity or parentage. Safety, availability to resources, opportunities for art and culture, location and other issues are some of the key reasons for this gap. In fact, Young (1998) found that “location of the school ha[s] a significant

effect upon student achievement, with students attending rural schools not performing as well as students from urban schools” (p.386). Based the research literature , the location of the school is a significant factor in student achievement at the middle school level. The opportunities location provides are vital to student success and extend into students’ aspirations for the future. Students from rural schools often realize the need to leave their homes for both education and a “perfect” job. For urban students that “perfect” job is often closer to home, as more industry and business opportunities are available in urban areas. (Barcinas & McCracken, 1991, p.39)

Research also shows that students participate in about an equal amount of extra curricular activities whether they attend a rural or urban school. However, the availability of activities greatly differs for the two groups. Students in urban schools have more courses and extra-curricular activities available to them. (Barcinas& McCracken, 1991, p.38)

If students do not seize the opportunities in front of them, it will not matter how many are presented to them. One of the biggest obstacles is to convince students of the importance of an education. Teachers, parents and community members must make every effort to promote the importance of a good education. Students must take this to heart. Finally, to make it work, students need to realize the value of and their ability to achieve a higher level of education. If students aspire to a higher level of education, they will have a much greater chance of achieving their goals and becoming productive members of society.

Students in urban schools are more likely to see themselves as capable attaining a higher education. In a recent study, “urban students were more likely to aspire to a

university education” (EQR, 2003, p.47). One reason for this is the level of education and employment of their parents. In urban schools parents are more likely to be professionals, such as lawyers, businessmen and women, and other professions that tend to value higher education (Barcinas & McCracken, 1991, p.33). In a study completed by The Ohio State University and the University of Guam, (74%) of urban parents expected their children to go on to higher education compared to only (61%) or rural parents. (Barcinas & McCracken, 1991, p.29) This statistic is extremely important when taking into consideration that “the decision of youth to enter college [is] strongly influenced by the expectations of their parents” (Barcinas & McCracken, 1991, p.30).

Disadvantages of Urban Schools

For all of their advantages, urban schools do have their disadvantages as well. While parents are often better educated, they frequently have more demands placed on their time. “Urban parents are often less able to contribute to their children’s schools in areas such as volunteerism, due to economic demands of more than one job” (Beineke, Foldes & Maness, 2004, p.2).

When we examine the research literature, a disadvantage of urban schools is quickly found when viewing results for students in the area of science. Results show that “a large percentage of U.S. students attending high-poverty urban middle schools achieve low levels of science proficiency, posing significant challenges to their success in high school science and to national and local efforts to reform science education” (Ruby, 2006, p. 23). “Urban students at the middle school level also lag behind their peers nationwide in their ability to perform relatively straightforward scientific tasks”

(Curriculum Review, 2007, p.11). Although, urban schools are working on improving science education there are barriers to overcome.

Ruby (2006) noted several issues compounding this problem. These problems include “lack of material, and underprepared teachers combined with initial low levels of proficiency block[ed] improvements in science achievement” (p.23). While science scores tended to be lower, math scores tended to be higher. On average test scores of urban students in the area of mathematics were higher than those of comparable rural schools (Young, 1998, p.407). Another determinate of student performance is motivation. Schlakman and Unrau (2006) found that motivation in mathematics and science greatly dropped with students in urban middle schools. In reading there was only a modest drop and for social studies there was no apparent difference. (p.82) According to Young, (1998) all the differences were much more related to socioeconomic status (SES) than location of the school. (p.407)

Another key element of successful schools is qualified teachers. Unfortunately, urban and rural schools both have difficulty in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, especially those in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Still, urban schools have a set of unique problems. “School districts across the country are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit new, well-qualified teachers. This is especially true for urban schools” (Boyd, Lankford, Loed & Wyckoff, 2005, p.1).

In addition to these problems, urban teachers also have to deal with the more serious issues of student violence and weapon possession. (Harste & Leland, 2005, p.60-77) Resulting from these issues is teacher absences, which are recorded at 17% in urban schools compared to 9% in rural schools. (Chung, Lacovelli, Mulvaney & Skolnik, 2005,

p.1) “Teaching in urban schools with their problems of violence, lack of resources, and inadequate funding is difficult” (Roth, Tobin, & Zimmerman, 2001, p.941).

“The problem of our urban schools is not simply one of poor teachers or large classes, there is more to the problem both in and out of the classroom” (Chung et al., 2005, p.3). A combination of these issues results in greater problems with school funding. Urban schools have, “special funding problems ...additional costs include security, attendance personnel, and even salary supplements designed to encourage teachers to work in inner-city schools” (Debertin & Goetz, 1994, p.2). These costs could be used to buy textbooks and other necessities for students.

To compound the problems of urban schools many are very large and find it very difficult to reduce class sizes. (Achilles & Finn, 1990, p.558). “Rural schools are significantly smaller than urban or suburban schools, with a mean school enrollment of 392 versus 663 in urban schools” (Domenech, 2006, p.28). These larger schools require more teachers, but often highly qualified teachers are difficult to find and funding becomes an issue. As a result, “urban schools face overcrowding and a combination of socioeconomic problems that at times makes them seem unmanageable” (Domenech, 2006, p.28).

As discussed earlier, “there is research evidence that small classes are important to increased pupil achievement in reading and mathematics in the early primary grades...There is evidence that pupils with lower academic ability tend to benefit more from smaller classes than do pupils with average ability.” (Achilles & Finn, 1990, p.558). Funds are not always available to reduce these class sizes. “The cost of smaller classes is high, requiring investment in both additional teacher salaries and additional classroom

space” (Achelles & Finn, 1990, p.558). Although it may be costly and difficult to reduce class sizes, research has shown that even a small increase in schools funds will yield dividends for students. In fact, a “moderate increase in spending may be associated with significant increases in achievement” (Greenwald et al., 1996, p.361).

Summary

A quality middle school education must be a high priority to everyone within the community. Teachers and community members must work hand in hand to provide middle school students with the best possible chance for success. At the same time middle schools must be held accountable for how efficiently they function and the quality of education they provide to students. State mandates are helping to hold these schools accountable. Teachers in turn are implementing best practices into their teaching and obtaining more training of these practices. To measure the effects of these practices state report cards are being presented annually to schools.

Many issues are important to consider when looking at the progress of these middle schools, such as curriculum, qualified teachers and technology. Curriculum must relate to what students know, need to know and be relevant and engaging. Successful curriculum becomes the vehicle for developing lifelong learning skills. Secondly, highly qualified teachers are necessary for a well functioning middle school. Yet, qualified teachers often leave poverty-ridden schools for higher paying jobs and better working conditions. Finally, technology used effectively in schools has the ability to transform a person’s life. It can create opportunities for the future, as well as make learning fun and relevant for students. At the same time, it has the unique ability to engage students who

do not enjoy school or see the importance of school. Students need to have a reason to attend and excel in school and sometimes technology provides that that reason.

Rural and urban schools both have apparent advantages, in addition to clear disadvantages. The most important advantages of rural schools consist of smaller class sizes, a higher sense of community and greater access to computers at school. (EQR, 2003, p.45) Conversely, one of the greatest disadvantages of rural schools is location. Location can promote or hinder students' opportunities to advanced learning. Museums, libraries and universities are located at greater distances from rural schools, creating a disadvantage for rural students.

Urban schools, on the other hand, have a distinct advantage when it comes to location. In many ways they are located in the heart of opportunity. Students can easily attend performances in the arts, go to a world-class library, view an art or history museum and participate in enrichment courses at local universities. The disadvantages for urban schools are larger class sizes, lower tests scores and urban violence. (Roth et al., 2001, p.941)

Rural middle schools and urban middle schools have unique advantages and disadvantages. To rate one school type over the other is difficult, if not impossible, considering the many variables that influence student learning. Both types of schools are improving as, "ample evidence exists that the law [NCLB] has helped build stronger, better-coordinated education systems" (Zavadsky, 2006, p.7). Regardless of whether a student attends a rural or urban middle school he or she can receive a quality education.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE

In preparation for this study of rural and urban middle schools, a vast amount of research literature was reviewed. In this literature there has been a great deal written on the performance of both rural and urban middle schools. However, there are still areas of study that need to be more fully researched. Questions still remain. Therefore, an analysis of these issues will be completed.

Importance of Achievement in Middle Schools

An ample amount of research exists documenting the importance of achievement in middle schools. All of this research proves that achievement in middle school is far more important than what was once believed. These studies show that middle school is a critical point in a student's education. (NMSA, 2003, p.28) Yet, studies also suggest that achievement should not be set to a time limit. Each student is unique and grasps information at different times. Lastly, research shows that the standards and standardized tests that are so commonly used fail to acknowledge students' individuality. "Educators should recognize students' efforts and support their developing work ethic, knowing that all students cannot reach a uniform standard at the same time. Emphasis should be on what the student has accomplished. Successful schools also help families see how a student's performance corresponds with national or state norms" (NMSA, 2003, p.28).

Hopefully, middle school is the time when students realize what they can accomplish, identify their vocational goals and initiate the necessary steps to accomplish

these goals. Opportunities missed can be a lifelong regret; opportunities seized a lifelong joy. The choices students make not only affect their education, they can affect their lifetime. NMSA (2006) has stated the importance of the middle school education, but failed to take into consideration the overriding importance of basic needs of all students. Students across our nation, whether in an urban or rural school, have survival needs that supersede educational needs. Many students are transient due to separation of parents, remarriage and other domestic issues; they spend time in multiple homes during the same week and as a result have much different priorities than those who live within a stable family structure.

Many issues children face involve health and safety, although NMSA argues that the value of education cannot be overestimated. While education is essential, it takes second place to the basic needs of food, water and shelter. Sadly, many students must struggle for these basic needs on a daily basis. While Unrau and Shlakman (p.81) found a significant decline in the motivation of middle school students, they failed to explain the underlying cause for the drop in motivation

As discussed in Chapter 2 (see p.18), a small increase in funding was found to provide improved test results. Although, a contrary opinion states, “Over the last two decades the question of how to best improve the achievement of students in our nation’s schools has gained increasing prominences. While expenditures have risen dramatically over this period, it has not been apparent that achievement has risen dramatically over this period, it has not been apparent that achievement has risen at all, much less commensurately” (Greenwald et al., 1996, p. 361).

Accountability

Research is limited on how accountability in schools affects performance. In this research there is much controversy over legislation such as NCLB and how it has and is affecting education in urban and rural schools. According to Bylund and Reeves (2005) under NCLB “it is not so important to know how well, or poorly, a school is performing relative to other schools as [it is] to know that it is making steady progress toward a performance goal that is prescribed by state policy” (p.360). However, accountability is necessary to establish healthy, well functioning schools that effectively educate the future of our country. Often, the only question is, what is the most efficient way to measure each school’s progress?

Curriculum

The amount of research for curriculum was limited as it primarily addressed the need for change. Most of the research is geared toward the process of change and the resulting effects on our schools. Students are being pushed farther and farther to succeed. The argument can be made that students are being pushed too far and too fast. However, one could also argue that students are advancing at a higher rate than their ancestors and deserve the opportunity to excel. The end result has been a concentrated emphasis on state standards.

National legislation, such as NCLB, promotes curriculum improvements. “NCLB’s focus on achieving proficiency in core academic subjects has prompted many school systems to develop detailed and properly sequenced curriculums. Many states are continually improving their core subject curriculums in response to NCLB. These high-

performing districts go further in articulating, refining, and supporting their state's standards" (Zavadsky, 2006, p.3).

However, curriculum research often ignores enrichment activities that are either planned or spontaneous. While great benefits may exist in these enrichment areas, standards are focused upon NCLB. District curricula are developed from these standards as the primary vehicle for achieving goals and objectives (NMSA, 2003).

Nevertheless, enrichment opportunities to educate students must be taken into consideration. Educators can seize valuable opportunities when inviting visitors into the classroom, going on field trips and taking advantage of local learning activities. These activities may not address state indicators, but they do provide amazing learning experiences. "The community is a major resource, serving as both a site for learning experiences that cannot be provided in a classroom and as a source of materials and guest experts for class activities" (NMSA, 2003, p.26).

Qualified Teachers

Until the NCLB Act was introduced, research on qualified teachers in the classroom was limited, largely due to a lack of a universal definition. Up to that point, the definition was greatly varied and subjective. This ambiguous definition was resolved with the implementation of NCLB. The legislative language states that, "No Child Left Behind requires that schools have 'highly qualified' teachers in all school districts, as 'highly qualified' generally means having majored in the field being taught" (Domenech, 2006, p.29). The NCLB act has attempted to create a greater percentage of qualified teachers in the classroom. Highly qualified teachers in the classroom are critical to student success. These teachers are in high demand as the need continues to increase in

urban and rural schools alike. Rural schools and urban schools still find it difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers. The main reason is advancement opportunities for teachers. The most qualified teachers tend to search for better employment opportunities that include higher pay and better working conditions. (Domenech, 2006, p.29)

Research shows that teachers must wear many hats in classroom; not having enough time to accomplish everything is common. Teachers should provide an education to students, but they should also provide an advocacy program for students. “Advocacy programs help students develop respect for self and others. They foster compassion, a workable set of values, and the skills of cooperation, decision-making, and goal setting. The advocacy program is design and based on the specific culture of the schools and community and is developed to meet the needs of those particular students” (NMSA, 2003, p.33).

Technology

Many variables need to be considered when comparing the use of technology in urban and rural middle schools. Just having technology in the classroom does not mean that technology will be used or used correctly. However, community support for technology is a key issue for middle school academic achievement and for future academic success. The research reviewed for this study suggested that the availability of technology in student’s schools and homes is vital to success. (Domenech, 2006, p.29)

If students are to reach their potential, they should have daily exposure to technology. As technology develops, the corresponding opportunity for students to use new technologies must also be developed. Technology should be used to facilitate teaching. It is not the “be all” of teaching, but it is an appropriate tool that should be used

often and with variation. The importance of technology is typically down played in rural schools because of funding, unavailability and the lack of desire to implement from adults/parents and sometimes school administration. (Deweese, 1999, p.2-4)

Community Involvement

Research in the area of community involvement was focused mostly on rural classrooms with some studies on how urban violence can affect schools. (Fullwood et al., 2001, p.5) Research indicates that rural schools frequently become the center of the community. (Deweese, 1999, p.2). Community involvement benefits not only the school, but also benefits the rural communities. Volunteers in rural areas seem to be more plentiful and more likely to help in schools. The school becomes a social gathering place and the heart of the community. (Deweese, 1999, p.2)

Research shows that community influence can have either a very positive or a very negative impact upon student learning. Violence from drugs and crime, particularly in urban areas can greatly hamper the involvement of the community. Many times those volunteers willing to help are deterred by situations in the community. Parents would help, but are unable to do as a result of employment requirements (Fullwood et al., 2001, p.5).

Rural Schools

There is a good amount of research literature on rural school performance, but much of the information does cross over to urban schools. Determining the difference between rural and urban schools in each study can sometimes be complicated. Research generally does not delineate between the two types of schools making it more difficult to obtain accurate information from those sources.

According to the research (Williams, 2003, p.70), community involvement and community opportunities, is the most prevalent difference between rural and urban middle school education. Rural communities tend to be stronger in many ways. They are united by students, school pride and community values.

While rural schools can have a great sense of community, they usually lack the opportunities that result from accessibility to universities and colleges. Likewise, museums and libraries are not easily accessible to rural students. Due to distance and funding gaps, visitations from authors, large newspaper, technology centers and other organizations are less available to rural schools.

At first glance, the standardized test scores of rural middle schools students would indicate a level of success equal to or better than the urban middle school student. “Overall, rural students perform as well as or better than their nonrural peers on standardized achievement tests” (Williams, 2003, p. 51). However, the research literature suggests that the economic status of rural areas is frequently lower than that of urban areas. Research overwhelmingly indicates “socioeconomic status is the strongest correlate of standardized test scores, and rural poverty rates are highest in areas with large concentration of people of color” (Williams, 2003, p. 51). So even though rural students appear to be keeping up with urban students in test scores, in actuality not all rural students are gaining the knowledge necessary to compete with their urban counterparts. In all subjects “poorer rural students scored considerably lower on citizenship and social studies tests than did students from upper socioeconomic urban communities” (Young, 1998, p. 388). Even with these statistics, the debate of rural schools versus urban schools endures and possibly always will.

Urban Schools

Urban schools have distinct advantages mostly related to location. Research indicates that school location positively impacts student achievement. This advantage is largely due to the opportunities that the location provides. Universities, libraries, museums and technology centers are more available to students in urban communities. (Young, 1998, p.386)

The research literature has focused mostly on science achievement with limited results in all other subject areas. Test scores in science and science application are lower in urban schools (NAEP, 2007, p.11). Many factors may contribute to lower test scores. The research indicates that motivation and lack of technology in the classroom could be contributing factors. Schlakman and Unrau (2006) might support motivation being the key factor. The motivation of students in urban schools reflects upon the academic achievement in all subject areas (p.82).

Surprisingly, the availability of computers in urban middle schools is lower than their rural counterparts. Again, research indicated that incorporating available technology into lessons would increase student achievement. Technology helps to motivate students by making education fun and relevant. (THE Journal, 2002, p.52)

Summary

Research on urban middle schools and rural middle schools is extensive and addresses many issues. A great deal of research has been conducted on the effects of middle school programs on the community in which they are located. The studies that

were reviewed were conclusive in finding that middle school education is of the utmost importance for all middle school students and the community in which they live.

Rural Middle Schools

Rural schools have clear advantages in the area of community involvement. Research points out that rural middle schools are not just in the community, but in many ways are the community (Deweese, 1999, p.2), and this has a very positive impact upon students and the community alike (Ediger, 2000, p.281). While community involvement tends in rural school tends to be significant, opportunities in the community tend to be limited for students.

Urban Middle Schools

Urban schools have a clear advantage in location. However, the proximity to violence in and around the urban school can be a disadvantage. Urban schools are often overcrowded with a deficit of highly qualified teachers (NCES, 2006, p.8) and students tend to perform poorly on basic scientific tasks. (Domenech, 2006, pg.29)

Commonalities Among Rural and Urban Middle Schools

Research shows that it is important to have qualified teachers in both rural and urban classrooms. In fact, teachers have a significant impact on student achievement. (Domenech, 2006, p.29) However, qualified teachers are difficult to retain in socioeconomically disadvantaged urban and rural schools. These socioeconomic issues also affect class size. Overcrowding in classrooms still occurs in many urban and sometimes in rural classrooms. Some debate remains on the effects of class size and the impact on student achievement. Most studies show that class size can make a markable

difference (Achelles & Finn, 1990, p.558); however some suggest that class size is less important in student achievement. (Greenwald, et al, 1996, p.369; Hoxby, 2006, p.1239)

Strengths and Weaknesses found in the Literature

While socioeconomic factors were addressed in the reviewed literature, the amount of research completed on these factors was limited. The importance of students' basic needs and motivation was overlooked in many of the studies, as well as the effects that these variables have on student performance. Although there is literature on rural middle schools as well as urban middle schools, there is an inadequate amount of research actually comparing urban and rural middle schools. Middle schools are vital to students, schools, communities and the future, but there is limited research on middle school achievement. Rather the reviewed studies compared achievement in rural and urban schools with a heavy focus on students in high school and elementary school, thus leaving a void in comparative research on achievement in middle schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Open enrollment has perpetuated the theory that the grass is greener on the other side. Until open enrollment began in Ohio, students were required to attend school in the district in which they lived. The quality of the school district was not a possible factor in deciding in what school district to enroll one's child. Students simply attended school in the district where they lived. If parents wanted their child to attend another school, they were either forced to move or pay tuition. Today, Ohio students are no longer bound to one school district. So, why not ask the question whether an urban middle school is inherently better than a rural middle school or is a rural middle school inherently better than an urban middle school. Is there a difference between how well students perform in these schools? Are the teachers more qualified in an urban or rural middle school? How does a parent determine where to send his or her child to receive the best education? These are all questions a parent might ask. So what are the answers? In order to address these very important issues, the three following questions were researched in Chapter Two.

1. According to the research, what are the advantages and disadvantages of rural middle schools?
2. According to the research, what are the advantages and disadvantages of urban middle schools?

3. Do students in rural middle schools receive an equal quality education to students in urban middle schools?

These questions were the basis for this research project. However, the debate about which school is better will likely continue for decades to come. The analysis of the research literature provides a starting point for discussion. In this analysis we can see areas where both urban and rural middle schools excel as well as areas where both need improvement.

This Master's Research Project examined the major factors that affect the strengths and weaknesses of urban and rural middle schools. The five key areas studied that influence student performance include: accountability, curriculum, qualified teachers, technology, and community involvement. All seem play a big role in the performance of children in both urban and rural middle schools.

This analysis serves as a basic scaffold for future studies that will look into the underlying differences of urban and rural middle schools. Perhaps future studies will also help explain why these differences occur and what can be done to improve student performance.

In Chapter Three, research in key areas was analyzed to find distinct differences between urban middle schools and rural middle schools. The resulting trends helped to identify key areas that both school types need to work on in order to improve student achievement. However, many variables are still left unaccounted for that may directly affect these students' achievement. These variables are a good starting point for future study.

The research literature strongly suggests that middle school is a critical time in a student's education. School location can play a vital role in education because of opportunities or the lack thereof provides for students. Parents and community also play a key role in student achievement. Qualified teachers are in high demand in both rural and urban schools and both have difficulty in retaining these teachers for an extended time. Although many studies show that smaller class sizes produce measurable improvements in student achievement, some studies indicate the improvement is minimal. Future studies need to address all these issues as well as the impact socioeconomic factors play in student achievement.

Conclusion

Rural and urban middle schools are unique in many ways. Rural schools thrive on the sense of being a part of something that matters. People want to belong and rural schools provide that opportunity often through academic accomplishments, athletics and school performances. The thrill of competition and achievement greatly unites rural communities. While the same can hold true for urban schools, but there appears to be an even greater degree of community in rural schools.

This sense of community is so strong that some schools have declined state funding because they would have been forced to give up their community school in exchange for a new building outside of the community. Instead of building the larger consolidated buildings, they have chosen to use private money to keep their schools open. Their desire to keep their community school intact is greater than their desire to have a new more modern building outside of the community.

Closing community schools often creates a great deal of controversy. While community members are for improving the educational opportunities, they often feel as though they are losing their community by giving up their old school. The reasons for this can be argued in many ways, but the loyalty to their community is admirable. This loyalty creates a very positive atmosphere in which people and community are valued.

Urban schools excel in the opportunities provided by their location. Students have greater access to many resources and therefore have opportunities that are not as easily accessible to rural students. These students are also more likely to further their education after high school. Urban students, on average, have higher educational goals and are prompted by their parents to attain higher education. In a study completed by The Ohio State University and the University of Guam, urban parents were more likely to promote higher education to their children. According to the study, urban parents were more often professionals. As professionals, they realized the advantages of higher education. Through their personal experiences, they understood the steps to obtain a higher education and had walked through doors that higher education can open (Barcinas & McCracken, 1991, p.29).

Both rural and urban schools find it difficult to keep quality teachers. Qualified teachers are frequently promoted into positions outside of the classroom or leave for better paying, more advantageous jobs outside of the school system. Funding is “a major issue” for both urban and rural schools in retaining qualified teachers (Deweese, 1999, p.2). However, funding is only part of the problem. It is important that funding be used effectively. The most beneficial use of materials occurs when they are used to involve students in learning. As stated by NMSA, “instructional materials and resources are most

worthwhile when they provide viewpoints and encourage young adolescents to explore new ideas (NMSA, 2003, p.26).

Achievement testing has had a significant impact on middle schools. For middle school problems, achievement tests have increased teacher awareness of the following: state and national standards, best practices, differential education, needs of intervention students, and materials available to help with each of these issues. Studies prove that teachers are making great strides in education. Teachers are taking more classes, monitoring closely student progress from year to year due to the newly introduced value added components on report cards and implementing best practices in their classrooms.

Recommendations

There are several areas that merit more in-depth research. The debate about whether rural or urban schools provide the best education still exists and studies should continue to evaluate this question. Based on the completion of this study, the following recommendations should be considered.

First, it would be helpful if there were more studies on specifically middle schools, both rural and urban. The amount of information on strictly middle school is limited. Most studies found for this project were composed of elementary, middle and high school, and primarily focused on either elementary or high schools. However, middle schools are important and should not be overlooked.

Second, the availability of technology in the classroom should be equal for rural and urban schools. Technology provides great additional learning opportunities for students. Therefore, technology should be made widely available for all students, regardless of location. For this to be implemented, school buildings need to be kept up-

to-date. Schools buildings that are older and deteriorating are not able to access the latest trend in technology.

Third, rural schools should not be disregarded. Looking into the documentation, it is evident that support is slowly coming to rural schools. This support is coming in a variety of ways. Rural schools are making great strides in the quality of education with greater community involvement and improved funding from state and federal sources for disadvantaged schools. Legislators are making education a priority. However, much of the funding is still going to elementary schools. Even though our country is facing a budget crisis, legislators must financially support middle school education.

Fourth, the need for qualified teachers in all schools is imperative. All students should be provided with highly qualified teachers. As professional educators, teachers should continue their education to stay current on educational progress and introduce these advancements into their classroom. Students today are the leaders of tomorrow. These future leaders deserve the best preparation and education possible.

Next, more research is needed to assess the influence of socioeconomic conditions have on urban and rural schools. This factor is often overlooked in the studies that were reviewed. For example, Shlakman and Unrau (2006, p.81), failed to explain the underlying causes for the drop in student motivation. Possible reasons could include the age of the student or lack of basic needs being provided in the home. Based on the research, additional study is certainly warranted to determine these underlying factors.

Finally, members of school communities must recognize the importance of their involvement. Rural and urban communities need to provide support for their schools. Community support can offer a comfort zone for students in which they can feel safe and

excel. Schools can be a symbol of community pride. Students can achieve great accomplishments when their school has the support of the community.

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