

# Districts on the Edge: The Impact of Urban Sprawl on a Rural Community

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This paper attempts to capture some of the controversy schools and education experience in rural communities which find themselves on the edge of urban sprawl. As suburbanites settle farther from metropolitan areas, once homogeneous rural communities must open up to new populations. Often, as described here, competing community expectations for schools and schooling clash and students are caught in the middle.

There can be no doubt that mass society has had a profound impact on small town life in America. Yet despite economic opportunity elsewhere, agricultural intensification, and predictions of doom, the small towns remain. In fact not only do towns survive, they maintain their uniqueness. Their story has been told often and well [4, 8, 18]. The function of schools within these survival struggles has also been interpreted many times. A special telling is that of Alan Peshkin's Mansfield (pseudonym) in *Growing Up American: Schooling and the Survival of Community*.

Rural America has been honored by educational researchers across the country who have come to realize that schooling in small communities is a significant part of a larger struggle to preserve a heritage. This recognition, along with other factors, has led to the establishment of rural education departments on many college campuses. Scholars at these institutions promote advanced telecommunications for rural schools, strategies for small school sharing and pairing, curriculum innovations with an eye toward limited funds, and a myriad of other research-based programs.

"At risk" communities, those suffering from isolation and loss of political leverage, loss of industry, or agricultural depression, have long been at the focus of "interventionist" research and development in rural education. Efforts to solve schooling problems in dwindling towns have been considered paramount. There is one type of community, however, which has thus far escaped the benefit of scholarly study despite a very real "at risk" status. I speak of the rural districts which, one day, find themselves (to the joy of some and the dismay of others) within the outer ring of concentric circles which enclose an urban metropolis. Schools within such communities suffer from very real problems, though of a different kind.

## METHOD

What follows is an attempt to portray the circumstances of a rural community on the edge of urban sprawl. As an instructor for one school year in this particular setting, I was involved in determining what the circumstances meant for the community, and more importantly, how the shifting demographics impacted on the school. For the purposes of this study, the pseudonym of Banon will replace the actual name of the village and the identity of community residents will be withheld.

In many ways, Banon's story is still unfolding. It is a story of perceptions, perspectives, and values, many of which are at the very heart of the community's social fabric. Through the course of interviews with school faculty and village residents, as well as the analysis of various survey returns, I came to the conclusion that it is not unfair to suggest that ideologically, residents of Banon align, in varying degrees, with one of two camps. There are those who feel their new proximity to the metropolitan area is, on the whole, advantageous. On the other hand, there are those who feel it is, on the whole, regrettable. What this means for schooling in Banon was the topic of both the interviews and surveys.

## THE SETTING

Most everyone has been to a small prairie town and can envision the fields and pastures which line the entrance to such a community. A look at the skyline along the approach will usually yield a few church steeples, a water tower, and more likely than not, a grain elevator.

Ten years ago, a town like Banon would have fit that description perfectly. Today, however, this is not the case. The Banon church steeples are there. The water

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tower is there, although it is a massive structure and colored light blue like those you might see in the middle of suburbia somewhere. It is very unlike the small, metallic-colored towers seen in most rural communities. The grain elevator, however, often the hub of a rural community, is gone.

Banon is situated about 30 miles from Minneapolis. This location puts the community on the western edge of a Twin Cities metropolitan sprawl, and at the very heart of one of the officially designated seven area metropolitan counties. In addition, however, the community lies on the edge of a large lake consisting of over ten miles of shoreline. The recreational possibilities presented by the water, coupled with the distance from the seamier aspects of urban life, have resulted in a steady influx of newcomers to the once very rural community.

The population of Banon grew modestly between 1960 and 1980. The 1987 estimate of the Minnesota Department of Energy and Economic Development for Banon's population, however, indicates that it has grown more in the last seven years than it did in the previous twenty. It has been the same for Banon Township, indicating a trend toward dividing up the countryside into hobby farms or country estates.

While this article was being written, Jack Lessinger [12] of the University of Washington-Seattle, published an interesting report in the June, 1987 edition of *American Demographics*. Lessinger's thesis is that a major demographic shift is beginning to occur nationwide.

According to Lessinger, it is the fifth such monumental migratory shift since the American Revolution, and consequently, he labels its manifestation "penturbia." Penturbs are rural communities located just outside what one would consider normal commuting distances to larger urban centers. Lessinger believes that the people who populated suburbia over the past fifty years were fundamentally different from those who are moving to penturbia now. The outlook was different. The values were different. Lessinger calls the new penturbanites "caring consumers," and maintains that they "prefer the simple yet cosmopolitan lifestyle found in many non-metropolitan areas." According to Lessinger, caring consumers guard their resources, be it energy, clean air, water, or cultural artifacts like historic buildings and parks. Conspicuously absent, however, is any allusion to these new caring consumers and their views concerning schooling. In the case of Banon, a penturb in every respect, this article will work toward an analysis of their views regarding education.

Lessinger labels Banon's county "Class 5." This means that it had an 11% growth rate between 1980 and 1985, more than double the national average. According to Lessinger, Class 5 counties "display characteristics of both penturbia and suburbia." Given the fact that he classified every county in the contiguous 48 states, this part of his analysis is amazingly accurate. To Banon's east lie suburbs within the same county which have suffered from some decline of late. This decline, of course, has been offset by growth in penturbs such as Banon.

One of the immediate results of the shifting demographics in Banon is the question of space in the schools. While it is not yet a critical issue at the high school, there is a severe shortage of classroom space at the elementary school. This fact would no doubt be near the top of an "index of suburb indicators" (or penturb indicators), if such an instrument existed. What one finds on the edge of urban concentric circles are young families, typically with elementary aged children. This seems to be the case in Banon.

Where demand is high, supply seems to follow, as do prices. Referring to Lessinger once again, Class 5 counties are labeled "Risky," meaning that these counties may be good sites for penturbanites. However, he urges caution due to inflated land prices in these areas. Once again, his analysis is accurate. An interview with a local estate salesman revealed that the same house built on similar lots in Banon or any of several other communities which lie to the west would cost up to \$20,000 more in Banon. The quality of life issue, with the lake, certainly plays a part, but so does a more favorable proximity to the urban center.

In terms of supply, the renovation and building going on in Banon is well beyond the most remote hopes of village councils in more typical rural communities. A Banon city councilman shared some new information regarding housing in an interview, "the city council just passed preliminary plans for two new housing developments to go up. One of them is going to have 99 homes in it."

Some small industry has followed the newcomers to Banon, but every new employer coming into town seems to coincide with the demise of a small business or two. Small operations have difficulty competing with the large variety of entertainment and service options just a short distance away from Banon in the suburbs.

Thus, in Banon, as in hundreds of penturbs like it, you have a once rural community challenged by the values, attitudes, and belief systems of an incoming population. Gordon Hoke, [10] an educational researcher for the Center for Instructional Research and Curriculum Evaluation at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign once wrote "school-centered disputes are only the beginning of a series of potentially volatile transactions that face residents in rural Illinois, and elsewhere." In penturbia, the potential volatility is quite a bit greater than in the more typical rural community. The differences in outlook are great. Often outlooks clash first over school issues. At the risk of overextending the metaphor, I believe it is safe to say that residents of Banon are "on edge" regarding the role of the school in their community.

## THE RURAL PERSPECTIVE

The data collection for this document consisted of a series of interviews with school faculty, administrators, and various village residents. In addition, surveys were distributed to all juniors and seniors at Banon High School to get their views on certain subjects and

background information regarding their home environments. Surveys designed to elicit household information were also distributed to first and second graders at the two parochial elementary schools in town. These were sent home with the children with instructions to have their parents complete and return them. The survey return rate from the high school students was 100% and returns from the parochial elementary schools reached 83%.

The first task was to separate responses into "insiders" (long-time residents) and "outsiders" (newcomers since 1970). Household information reveals a slightly higher incidence of single-parent homes among the newcomers, as well as slightly more use of day care facilities for their children. Whether or not there are any youth behavioral manifestations of this fact, or indeed, whether or not the statistics, due to availability sampling, are misleading, is not an issue of concern. What is of concern is the rural perception that problems within the community arise from these circumstances. (See Table 1).

An English teacher at Banon who has taught in the junior and senior high school for the past eighteen years represented the rural perception when asked if she had seen any changes in the school in recent years:

This year more than any other I've noticed. We have, all of us, remarked on this year's seventh grade class as the year the outside world finally hit Banon. We have more kids from single-parent families. We have more kids who have moved into the community rather than having been here all their lives, with grandparents here, and everything. We have more kids who are less interested in school as the most important thing in their lives. I'll bet you we have everything you have heard of as a social issue with young kids. Everything. I mean drugs, sex, alcohol, tobacco, single-parents, divorce, child abuse, everything. We have become urban real fast. Almost overnight.

One would have great difficulty establishing a correlation between student learning and behavioral problems, and incidence of newcomers to the community. And even if one could accomplish it, it would tell us nothing about causation. But my own experiences as a teacher at Banon were a sharp contrast to my experiences teaching in a more typical rural setting. For example, in one section of a psychology class of 34 seniors, I observed the following. There were two married females in the class, each with an infant child, and one unmarried father of a newborn child. During the course of the class, one single male left home with pick-up truck and loaded shotgun, threatening suicide. He stayed away all night. Arriving for school the next morning he was taken by the sheriff to a treatment facility where he remained a month. Another male student preferred to sit alone rather than sit with peers while doing group work in the classroom. Three males worked full 40 hour shifts at local manufacturing plants. Several females worked almost full-time as waitresses. Thirty-

**TABLE 1**  
Household Survey Information

PUBLIC SCHOOL HOUSEHOLDS (N = 166)							
	Insiders (N = 65)			Outsiders (N = 101)			
	Banon	Metro		Banon	Metro		
Employment	43%	57%		35%	65%		
Location							
# of Parents	<b>0</b> 2%	<b>1</b> 20%	<b>2</b> 78%	<b>0</b> 1%	<b>1</b> 35%	<b>2</b> 64%	
Working							
Single Parent Homes	<b>Yes</b> 4%	<b>No</b> 96%		<b>Yes</b> 10%	<b>No</b> 90%		
Children at Day Care	<b>Yes</b> 8%	<b>No</b> 92%		<b>Yes</b> 9%	<b>No</b> 91%		
Banon Rural/Suburb Classification	<b>Rural</b> 45%	<b>Sub.</b> 55%		<b>Rural</b> 43%	<b>Sub.</b> 57%		
PAROCHIAL SCHOOL HOUSEHOLDS (N = 65)							
	Insiders (N = 29)			Outsiders (N = 36)			
	Banon	Metro		Banon	Metro		
Employment	59%	41%		19%	81%		
Location							
# of Parents	<b>0</b> 0%	<b>1</b> 52%	<b>2</b> 48%	<b>0</b> 3%	<b>1</b> 44%	<b>2</b> 53%	
Working							
Single Parent Homes	<b>Yes</b> 2%	<b>No</b> 93%		<b>Yes</b> 10%	<b>No</b> 90%		
Children at Day Care	<b>Yes</b> 21%	<b>No</b> 79%		<b>Yes</b> 9%	<b>No</b> 91%		
Banon Rural/Suburb Classification	<b>Rural</b> 52%	<b>Sub.</b> 48%		<b>Rural</b> 42%	<b>Sub.</b> 58%		

two of the 34 students were working at least part-time.

Not one of these cases would have been unheard of in a rural classroom. But the heavy concentration of such cases in a single class was evidence that I was teaching in a far different setting than I was used to. Every indication pointed to the fact that Banon, once very typical of rural settings, is so no longer.

The perspective of another long-time resident is helpful. Regarding changes in the community and the school, Banon's athletic director has this to say:

When I came here first, the town had more of a sheltered, small-town feel to it. The kids were into the school as being *the* activity. It

wasn't that the kids didn't have cars, didn't hold jobs, because they did do those things, but the focus still seemed to be very much around the school. And that has gradually changed through the years to a point where no longer do I consider Banon to be a rural community. It still has a rural element, but if you look at Banon and compare it to say, Nothem (to the west), you can really see there is a tremendous difference between the two communities.

We definitely now have students coming to us whose perspective is not necessarily the school as a focus. Instead, the school is where they come during the day. They have tons of activities going on in other places that they can get to. The focus is definitely away from Banon as much as it is in Banon. The kids just don't need a school activity for them to have something to do. (See Table 2).

His comments are perceptive and describe an integral part of the contrast between views of mainline Banonites and newcomers regarding the role of the school. The question may be best put using a quote from Alan Peshkin's study of Mansfield.

"Mansfield's" children must be competent to cope with the world beyond its borders. But the nature and limits of competence are defined by the mainstream Mansfield, just as the community is essentially defined in his terms. For better or for worse the school serves those whose views dominate. And like a good shoe, Mansfield High School fits mainstream Mansfield.

**TABLE 2**  
Student Survey Information

JUNIORS & SENIORS N = 166			
	Yes	No	
1 Do you consider yourself an active participant in the affairs of Banon High School?	56%	44%	
	Banon	Metro	
2 In which vicinity do you spend most of your entertainment hours?	63%	37%	
	Yes	No	
3 Are you interested in what the people of Banon think of you?	63%	37%	
	Yes	No	
4 Do you hold a full or part-time job outside of school hours?	86%	14%	
	Yes	No	
5 Do you consider school boring?	82%	18%	

The problem in perturbs such as Banon is that it is very unclear who is defining the "nature and limits of competence" for the school. Whose views of schooling dominate? Or, more importantly, how have compromised views affected the state of educational affairs in Banon?

The uneasiness of mainline Banonites regarding the school is due to their perception that the new suburban element 1) has introduced undesirables into the community, and 2) has diminished the nonacademic and noneducative functions of the school. For example, many long-time residents believe the school has changed drastically in recent years. Apathy, they believe, is rampant. School spirit is dead. Successful athletic teams which in the past served to unite the community are now consistent losers. There is a general feeling that the new element is responsible for these circumstances.

Two of the six Banon School Board members can be labeled newcomers to the community. Lines are seldom drawn, there are few 4-2 splits on issues, but it is interesting to note some things happening at the school which lend credence to the rural view that the Board has somehow let control slip away.

One of the best parts of Peshkin's treatment of Mansfield is his analysis of the district's selection of a new superintendent. Mansfield's Board of Education screened and dismissed candidates for "having ideas for the city schools," "having too many ideas," being "too intelligent for this community," and for thinking a candidate might be "a little slow with discipline problems." In so doing, the Board defined their community's beliefs about the role of the school. Peshkin concluded:

After hearing their deliberations, who could doubt that they sought a person who would administer the school system in their spirit, true to the prevailing outlook? 'He's country', they agreed and thereby reassured themselves. Neither in questions to the candidates nor in their deliberations afterward did they focus on a candidate's capacity to lead Mansfield to academic grandeur. They inquired, instead, about a candidate's fit with their orthodoxy and then eliminated one man after another until they discovered they felt most right about Reynolds.

Not every rural community does things the Mansfield way. I believe, however, that an inclination to the familiar, to the conservative, to explicitness about order and discipline is more the norm than the exception. Personally, I have witnessed the recruitment of two superintendents in very small, rural districts. In each case, the candidate chosen was not only from a small town background, but was coming, professionally, from a rural district as well.

But this was not the case in the selection of Banon's current superintendent. First, he is a native of an urban area on the east coast and does not fit anyone's definition of "country." Secondly, he is an extraordinarily articulate man, something which might have worked against him in Mansfield. Third, his work just prior to accepting the superintendency in Banon was managing the

curriculum and instructional affairs of a large district in southern Minnesota. He has made no bones about the fact that he is trying to bolster the school system academically, or lead them to "academic grandeur." He has introduced much more testing into the curriculum, a comprehensive gifted education program, as well as several academically oriented extracurriculars. He maintains that discipline is outside his sphere of duties, and is the responsibility of the principal. He asserted when he took the position that he would not honor a time-tested Banon postulate which stated that new teachers be started at minimum salary even if it meant they would be low on experience and training. In other words, he made it plain he intended to hire experienced, proven teachers despite their cost, and has done so. And there was apparently an agreement between the Board and the new superintendent regarding the purchase of a car for his business and personal use. No one seems to know the details of the arrangement, but the car remains a sore spot for many in the district. It is difficult to imagine such a man being hired in a rural community. He is not a native of the region, he has no apparent philosophic bent for fiscal conservatism, and he has no desire to deal with discipline.

Such a man might fit "like a good shoe" in a large, affluent suburb, not fit at all in a rural area, and fall somewhere in between in a suburb like Banon. The superintendent may have aptly described the situation himself in an interview:

**Question:** Do you see Banon becoming, eventually, a suburb of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area?

**Superintendent:** I think sometimes we consider ourselves a suburb now. I think half the people in the community may consider themselves a suburb, and the other half may not. This may be part of our problems.

The issue of sports comes into play. Due to location rather than size, Banon High School has been thrust into a "suburban" conference with schools many times larger than itself. This fact, coupled with what may be a few "down" years in terms of athletic talent, have led to poor performances by the school's athletic teams.

To the dismay of many in the community, the superintendent and athletic director have done nothing to discipline or remove coaches, as if such maneuvering might turn scores around. An image of an apathetic high school without much in the way of pomp and circumstance is beginning to emerge in the community. One social studies teacher put it this way:

There is no school spirit in this school at all. None whatsoever. And that's really sad. There was more school spirit ten years ago than there is now. And that's the honest truth. Part of this is due to the fact that 1) we do not produce winning teams, that helps, and 2) we have too many other things to do. It's not cool to get fired up at a pep fest, for instance.

And that's unfortunate because I think that a lot of young people are missing out on a lot of things.

This kind of picture of their school is unlike the memories (selective or not) of their own experiences at the high school. This leads to fears of a school environment which breeds the alienation they have heard about in the larger urban and suburban districts; schools where kids become lost in the shuffle, get cut from athletic teams, or are prohibited from singing in the choir or playing in the band. Couple these fears with the perception that it is the new element which has contributed to the increase in alcohol and drug consumption among students, exhibition driving, punk hairdos, etc., and you get an idea about how the mainstream Banonite feels about what the newcomers are doing to the school.

### THE SUBURBAN PERSPECTIVE

Counter to the impression of problems among youth in the community from the rural perspective is the suburban perspective. The newcomers see Banon as a small homogeneous community free of some of the riffraff of larger suburbia. For many, the migration to Banon was part of a larger child raising ethic which maintains that a smaller community is a better place to bring up kids. If there are drug and alcohol problems at the new school, they are not as severe as at their previous schools. If there is some unwanted "exhibition driving," it is better done on Main Street in Banon than on some interstate in suburbia.

But what about the newcomers' views on schooling? The superintendent, himself a newcomer, put it this way:

Our school system has changed from a more rural population with a stronger historical perspective to a more suburban population where more people are coming in and working in industries that are based on change in our economy and our society. I think those changes are being reflected in our schools with their attitude.

The more rural group, with a more historical perspective, I feel, had a very strong work ethic and what they were trying to portray through the schools is that it was good for kids to work hard and to acquire skills which would allow them to be productive and work hard with those skills.

I think as the changes come with the new suburban outlook and the more technologically associated employee coming into town, that the "work hard" ethic would not necessarily be lost, but added to that would be the dimension of "working smart" in addition to "working hard." This means that there has been more focus in the school recently on such things as gifted programs for youngsters

to accelerate their academic programs by moving more quickly through the pre-specified program.

I believe that from the point of view of most newcomers, the superintendent has done some admirable things. Since they have no historical perspective on what the high school once was or how it once functioned, dismissing community maintenance roles is easily done. What they want for their children is a school system which brings out maximum academic ability, helping them toward maximum social mobility, something the superintendent referred to as "working smart." They resist the idea of the high school as a source of entertainment, a social center for themselves or their kids.

What makes one think of Banon as a community on edge, in addition to being geographically on the edge, is that despite a sympathetic superintendent, the newcomers feel the school remains dominated by the rural element. The Board of Education is dominated by mainstream Banonites. And a critical problem of space at the elementary school goes unresolved to date by virtue of the fact that two mill levy increase referendums were defeated in the spring of 1987. This fact alone is ample evidence for the newcomers that long-time residents still call the shots regarding education.

Another circumstance, one into which I was personally drawn, makes clearer the differentiation between the two elements in the community, although it is somewhat unrelated to education. Throughout the 1986-1987 school year, a controversy existed over the site selection and construction of a new historical center for Banon's county. The old one, located in Banon, is considered too small.

One group in the community favored construction on Banon Lake of a million-dollar-plus facility with genealogy library and climate control capabilities to preserve manuscripts and artifacts. Others preferred to restore a deteriorating farmsite just out of town currently on the National Register of Historic Places. Part of the house could be restored for genealogy research, another part could function as a museum, and the outbuildings could perhaps be renovated to maintain a farm zoo or something similar. The cost would be a fraction of the other option.

At somewhere near mid-year I was telephoned by a long-time resident and member of the local historical society. Acknowledging a few commentary pieces on rural issues I had done for Minneapolis and St. Paul papers, she asked me to write an editorial for the local paper in defense of the farmsite option. Somewhat sympathetic with the rural element, as well as feeling a bit honored to have been asked, I did so. The incident illustrates another arena where the clash between long-time residents and newcomers manifests itself.

Personal backgrounds of Banon's teachers also reflect the patterns unfolding in the community. Generally, the older teachers at Banon reside within the community. If pressed, most would sympathize in many ways with the rural element. The newer teachers at Banon, on the other hand, generally commute from the more established suburbs, and sympathize a bit more with the suburban

element looking to maximize academic achievement. A glance at the make-up of the superintendent's various academic committees reveals that predominantly they consist of newer teachers. As well, there were rumors that many of the older teachers had actually voted against the referendum.

All of these things may leave newcomers to the community with the impression that the school is still very much old-fashioned despite the best efforts of the superintendent. With no ties to Banon, they are demanding the very best from the schools for their children, and many feel they are not getting it.

## CONCLUSION

I have tried to relate ways in which the conflict over control of the school manifests itself. I do not believe the struggles in Banon are unique, but I do believe the size and scope of the problems are common to penturbia. There are many rural communities in this country which grow closer and closer each year to the ever-extending concentric circles of an urban metropolis. As they attract newcomers, disputes erupt.

It is the intent of this paper to go one step beyond identification of the struggles, however. How do the struggles impact on the education provided at the school?

I have already discussed the fact that many adults see the students turning away from the school as the focal point in their adolescent lives. Survey information taken from 166 juniors and seniors at Banon High School indicate this may be true for a large percentage of students, though perhaps not for the majority. Some 56% of the students surveyed indicated that they considered themselves an active participant in the affairs of Banon High School, while 44% said they were not. A few examples illustrate the impact of such a large disinterested group within the school.

Most rural educators agree that homecoming is one of the major events of the school year. In addition to a dance after the football game, the celebration is often marked with the construction of floats and a parade down Main Street. In Banon, there is none of this. Although students decorate their halls with streamers and posters, there is no parade and no dance. When asked why the school has no homecoming dance, one teacher responded, "We used to, but kids just stopped coming. We can't compete with the entertainment options provided by the Cities," (Minneapolis/St. Paul).

Once last winter Banon's student council decided to stage a mid-winter dance, thinking that proper advertising and plenty of advance warning might make it a success. They booked a local entertainment act and printed elaborate tickets telling of the strobe lights, video screens, and all of the extras which would make the evening special. I was asked to sell tickets to the senior class since I had daily contact with 95% of them. For two or three weeks I attempted to sell some of the \$4 tickets. By the week of the dance itself, I had not sold one. The senior high kids were just not interested. Having booked the entertainment, however, the student council was in a

bind. To prevent financial catastrophe to its limited budget, the student council was allowed to open the dance to junior high students, something never before done at Banon. It was estimated that 90% of the students who attended were in the seventh or eighth grade.

The issue of students working at low-wage jobs while attending school is one that can clearly differentiate the rural school from a suburban one. In Banon, 86% of all the juniors and seniors hold part-time positions. Contrary to the case in most rural areas, Banon students have no difficulty finding part-time work. Most teachers at Banon see such employment as a negative contribution to their overall education.

Surveys indicate that 37% of Banon's juniors and seniors spend most of their entertainment hours in the "metropolitan vicinity," 63% in the "Banon vicinity." On the question of whether or not the students "care what people in Banon think of them," the percentages are almost exactly the same. The correlation of the two questions is high ( $\phi = .78$ ).

Changes have come to Banon and there will be more changes in the years to come. From a rural perspective, these changes may be just as harmful as the loss of a major industry in a remote rural area. What can be done to provide a more harmonious atmosphere in the community and the school? Can Banon combat the unacceptable cultural consequences of life near an urban center and maintain a school where academic achievement is maximized while emphasis is also placed on community maintenance functions? Being a community "on the edge," perhaps the opportunity exists for achieving the best of both worlds. But the worst of both worlds is possible too.

There is need for careful study. From a rural perspective, districts on the edge are "at risk" populations. As the homogeneous atmosphere and the feeling that "everyone knows everyone" begins to diminish, the local school becomes a visible source of conflict. The resulting struggles for control of the school can either subdue one perception of what the school ought to be in favor of another view, or integrate the perspectives by combining the strengths of each to create the best possible educational environment.

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## ERIC/CRESS NOW LOCATED IN CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC/CRESS) is now operating at its new location in Charleston, WV. Operations began June 13, 1988. ERIC/CRESS will continue to provide the services for which it is known, and it will continue to represent the same interests that it has in the past.

ERIC/CRESS is part of the Educational Resources Information Center, a decentralized nationwide network designed to collect and make available to both professional educators and the public all significant documents and articles about education. Nationwide, there are 16 clearinghouses, among which the entire scope of education is divided.

The scope of interest for ERIC/CRESS will continue to be American Indians and Alaska Natives, Mexican-Americans, migrants, outdoor education, rural education, and small schools. ERIC/CRESS will continue to be actively involved with the associations and educators most interested in this scope. Work is underway to reaffirm existing relationships.

New plans for ERIC/CRESS include the following products and services:

- a *toll-free* telephone number: 800/624-9120 (in WV: 800/344-6646); just ask for "ERIC/CRESS,"

- a parents' guide to resources in the ERIC database,
- camera-ready articles for rural news weeklies,
- a presentation for journalists about how they might use the ERIC system in their work,
- a learning package for professors to use with education students,
- a workshop for librarians and others about new developments in the ERIC system and new techniques for searching the ERIC database on compact disks (CD/ROM), and
- ERIC/CRESS Textfile, which presents papers developed by our authors in Apple and MS—DOS formats.

The new host institution for ERIC/CRESS is the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL). AEL has served the needs of rural educators and their communities since 1966. (CBH)

For more information contact C. Todd Strohmenger, Director, at 800/624-9120.