

## “A Reassessment of the Social and Economic Benefits of Rural Schools on Local Communities: The Case of New York State”

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John W. Sipple is an associate professor in the Department of Development Sociology at Cornell University. Additionally, he serves as director of the New York State Center for Rural Schools (<http://NYRuralSchools.org>) and co-faculty director of Cornell’s Community and Regional Development Institute (CaRDI: <http://cardi.cornell.edu>). This center and institute aim to solve systemic problems and improve opportunities in underserved communities, enhance data use by local and state leaders, and study policy impacting schools and communities. Sipple’s research analyzes the implementation of education and social policies on local communities and their public schools. He is currently studying the sharing of services between school districts and municipalities to enhance programs and reduce costs, the impact of the implementation of universal pre-kindergarten on community vitality, and the measurement of educational opportunity across New York State’s 700 school districts. He has published broadly and at numerous regional, national, and international conferences. Recently, he coedited (with Carolyn Brown and Lisa M. McCabe) the *2011 Yearbook of the Politics of Education Association*, which investigated the “Politics of Pre-Kindergarten Education.” He earned his BA from Dartmouth College, an MEd from the University of Virginia, and a PhD from the University of Michigan.

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**Summary and Findings:** The role of rural schools in local communities has long been one of the key discussions among regional scientists, planners, economists, education administrators, and policymakers. School district consolidation, in particular, has forced many small rural schools to close in order to relieve fiscal stress of governments. However, little is known about the socioeconomic impacts of the closures of these schools on local communities. Lyson (2002) demonstrates that, in the 1990s, the presence of rural schools provided significant social and economic benefits to local communities in New York State. It remains unclear, however, about the role of rural schools on local and regional development during the economic upturns and downturns of the past two decades. In this paper, we revisit Lyson’s hypothesis tests by employing multiple-year census data and geoinformatic analysis of school locations to reassess the impacts of the existence of a school on rural communities.

**Implications for Policy and Practice:** In an era of tight budgets and frequent demographic decline in rural areas, this study aims to provide guidance on decisions to site, close, or merge schools in rural communities. It has been commonly argued that closing a school destroys its local community. This study promotes a more complex discussion of this argument and presents a more nuanced set of implications for rural communities—namely, differential impacts on incomes versus housing values.