RTI INTERNATIONAL | Center for Education Services

Rural Family and Community Engagement

About the RTI Center for Education Services

The RTI Center for Education Services partners with educators to promote thriving learning environments that facilitate success for all students. From the classroom to the boardroom, our work focuses on four areas that we believe are levers for change in education: strengthening instruction, developing leaders, improving organizational operations, and facilitating collaborative networks.

Education has a monumental and compounding impact throughout a person's life by opening doors and broadening opportunities. At the societal level, education affects the economic vitality of communities, states, and nations. We partner with educators who understand and act on the trends and practices that create possibilities for learners at all levels.

We're partnering with K–12 educators to challenge the status quo by providing job-embedded support tailored to meet the needs of these educators. We apply a passionate, professional, and no-nonsense approach to drive meaningful solutions that are both actionable and sustainable. Technical assistance is always customized to best meet the unique needs of each context.

Our staff members endeavor to turn knowledge into practice through rigorous research and hands-on implementation support. Every education project benefits from an integrated approach that offers access to the breadth of content expertise, staff experience, and research insight that differentiates us from our competitors.

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Greene County Schools (GCS) in eastern North Carolina is a small, rural school district with seven schools and approximately 3,000 students.

GCS leadership has recognized the assets that come with a community of that size and has worked to leverage the tight-knit relationships to support their students.

On March 18, 2023, at the "Community Workshop," the Greene County community came together for GCS students. More than 60 participants, including families, local politicians, business owners, faith leaders, and GCS teachers and administrators, came together. This community workshop generated authentic, collaborative conversations about how partnerships within the Greene County community and with GCS could impact the success of their students. This well-attended and active conversation was the result of several preceding efforts, including district-wide professional learning and intentional community outreach.

During the community workshop, participants in small groups were asked a series of questions that focused on key elements of the partnership to provide feedback to the district: why it matters, how to do it, and desired outcomes. The community responded:

Why does partnership matter?

Although their approaches ranged from providing role models to students to supporting teachers, every answer pointed back to the reason for the conversation: because the interested parties all have the "same goal, to support students in becoming productive, competitive, and prepared for life after graduation, to achieve their full potential." Additionally, participants were asked to describe the qualities of a strong community partner. The outstanding qualities were partners that were communicative, open to collaboration, and dedicated to being trusting and understanding of each other.

How do we partner?

Although it is crucial to know the why behind the work, it is also important to make decisions on how to do the work. Participants were asked how they envisioned the community and GCS partnering with one another. Responses included concrete examples such as continuing the work of building out a volunteer program that meets real needs and is easy to access, linking students to community partners that can help them with opportunities to build their real-world experience, and developing structures to create strong lines of two-way communication to support the ongoing work.

What are the desired outcomes of our partnership?

Ultimately, the conversation concluded with a discussion around outcomes. An effective partnership is one that has shared goals. Though different supports will be provided by different partners, ensuring everyone is working toward common goals assists in progressing along a shared path. Through their partnerships, Greene County community members and school staff decided they wanted to see the following:

- A demonstration of mutual respect by improving their overall relationship and communication.
- Improved student outcomes through continued student support.
- Increased two-way involvement between GCS and families and community.

As educators, when time is invested to engage our families and community, this kind of meaningful connection is the goal. All too often, our efforts are not based on research and evidence and therefore fall short of actions needed to spark and sustain true engagement. In the following white paper, you will learn about RTI International's approach to family and community engagement (FACE), the research behind FACE, and more in-depth explanations on how a district makes progress in this area.

What Research Tells Us about Family Engagement

Overview

Fifty years of research show that FACE in education "is foundational for child development, student achievement, school improvement, and family and community wellbeing" (NAFSCE, 2022a). Despite compelling evidence, many FACE efforts are afterthoughts in school improvement efforts. FACE is a critical component for student, teacher, and family satisfaction, retention and growth in schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). When implemented effectively, FACE efforts honor the expertise that families and communities possess. Research shows us that family engagement is one of the top indicators of a student's success in their educational career (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Educators can look to research examples that display educators' ability to have an impact on the level of engagement. The way a school chooses to engage with families dictates the actual potential that exists for partnership to occur.

Rural Research

FACE in rural communities is a critical lever for student success. After studying rural schools in all 50 states, Showalter and colleagues (2019) found that, "While some rural schools and places thrive, others continue to face nothing less than an emergency in the education and well-being of children" (p. 1). In light of this emergency, we highlight the impact FACE can have and Ishimaru's (2019) suggestion:

> To move beyond "random acts of engagement" (Weiss et al., 2010), systemic collaboration practices may need to shift from remediating families and staffing family engagement positions to cultivating reflective educator practice to fuel collective organizational improvement and leveraging family expertise to foster professional learning (p. 30).

Coladarci (2007) recommended that researchers share additional criteria about the rural context they study, including "community size, density of population, proximity to urbanized areas, economic dependencies, median household income, modal educational attainment, and commuting patterns (physical and virtual alike)" (p. 3) to add transferability to their study results. In the case studies that follow, these characteristics are included to compare them with readers' contexts.

High-impact family engagement strategies are collaborative, culturally competent, and focused on improving children's learning (NAFSCE, 2010). These strategies include building authentic personal relationships through home visits, community walks, and student-led conferences to look at student learning and growth. More traditional events and activities, such as curriculum family night and parent–teacher conferences, have small effects on student achievement (Connecticut State Department of Education, n.d.).

one in five

public school students attend a rural school

(Coladarci, 2007, p. 1)

almost one-third

of all public schools are located in rural areas

(Johnson & Strange, 2005, p. 3)

more students

in the united states attend rural schools than in the nation's 85 largest school districts combined

(Showalter et al., 2019)

Family engagement contributes positively to student outcomes.

It has been shown to lead to the following:

INCREASED
student achievement
(Fantuzzo et al., 1995)

REDUCED
absenteeism
(Epstein & Sheldon, 2002)

BETTER
student-teacher relationships
(Dearing et al., 2008)

INCREASED
cultural awareness
(Marschall, 2006)

IMPROVED
trust in schools
(Payne & Kaba, 2001)

HIGHER
graduation rates
(Barnard, 2004)

HIGHER
perceptions of student aptitude by teachers
(Kuperminc & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008)

POSITIVE
attitudes toward learning
(Fantuzzo et al., 2004)

IMPROVED
social-emotional competnence in children
(Barnard, 2004)

The outcomes above are possible in rural communities when research-based best practices are paired with local knowledge funds (Mapp & Bergman, 2019). When this is done intentionally, personalized strategies are developed that fit the context of the community and the students living there. However, when educators are able to apply high-impact family engagement principles to leverage the assets of their rural communities, their students are more successful.

Family Engagment Research

Two important threads of family engagement work are seeking and honoring community input and leadership coaching. Research in rural communities elevates the importance of listening to families' stories and perspectives for their children's education, and this builds—or sometimes rebuilds—trust with families. For example, one study conducted in rural New York built strong relationships between families and social workers through continued, ongoing engagement with families in a mobile home community. Blitz et al. (2013) noted that "This model came to life in the mobile home community through consistent and predictable home visits, family focus groups, and time invested in knocking on doors and talking to people sitting in their yards. Through those engagements, families had opportunities to be heard and heal with and within the system." As a result, families and educators co-created a family leadership program that confronted long-lasting challenges with communication, stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion that family members experienced while they were in school. The co-creation of the parent leadership training program had several positive impacts:

1. The program increased trust because of sustained interviews and presence in students' homes.
2. The program confronted challenges with communication, stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion that emerged, lasting since parents were in school.
3. The program proved the necessity of involving school leaders in every step of the process.

Additionally, research supports coaching school leaders to foster strong systems for family engagement and building their capacity and their staff's capacity to form trusting relationships with families. For example, Huscroft-D'Angelo and colleagues (2018) interviewed rural school administrators and student services personnel to explore needs of youth with emotional and behavioral challenges and their families and the barriers that exist to access school and community services. Because of the unique characteristics of rural communities, school leaders are well-positioned to critically examine how to leverage rural community assets and mitigate rural community challenges.

In the Huscroft-D'Angelo study (2018), the researchers implemented a phone-based parent-to-parent support program to leverage the tight relationships and pre-existing trust that existed within the community. Potential barriers were frequently changing phone numbers or not answering the phone or time commitment from families willing to make the calls. Ultimately, school leaders shared that there was minimal direct support for families and no systematic support system for rural families. Leaders considered how they might recruit and train peer-parents for this highly confidential role. This direct support was long overdue for families and resulted from leaders' critical reflection on current practices and systems, or lack thereof, for family engagement.

Community Engagement Research

Research highlights the value in building strong connections and relationships with community partners to support students. Community is inclusive of multiple entities such as businesses, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, social services, and health services.

Within a range of diverse settings, Hirota and Jacobs (2003) found that members of the community—including educators, families, students, businesses, and faith-based organizations—aimed to achieve three objectives when collaborating:

1. Build understanding, common frameworks, and a sense of common values.
2. Create political will and establish the school system's accountability to the community.
3. Shift the dynamics of power toward more community ownership of the schools.

Research on community engagement highlights the importance of community collaboration. For example, Dunn Shiffman (2019) draws attention to a potentially untapped community resource, adult English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, to intentionally connect with multilingual communities. Dunn Shiffman notes, "Adult learners often develop relationships with instructors and classmates—and those interactions in turn can provide important support, information, and connections to educational resources for children in K–12 schools" (p. 538). The study explored how instructors in a regional adult ESL program supported relationships between immigrant families and their children's schools in a rural Virginia school district. As a result of the partnership, the adult ESL instructor, coordinator, and district leadership built positive relationships and a sense of urgency.

In a second example, Ingman and colleagues (2017) highlight the importance of leveraging rural community knowledge when conducting a community-engaged curriculum writing process for a middle school service-learning curriculum. As a result of this study, they learned that those with knowledge of the school contexts and rural communities were just as important to have on the team as those with curriculum design knowledge. Creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving behaviors were necessary to conduct this lengthy but worthwhile process with the community. The community was involved in the design, suggested revisions, and sought student feedback. The curriculum offered artistic expression for students and encouraged group collaboration. Students presented at school board meetings, created artistic models, and collaborated on various aspects of the project. Incorporating community feedback into curriculum revisions effectively aligned what was planned and how it was executed for students in that school community. Overall, engaging and seeking feedback from the community builds trust, transparency, and relationships that positively impact student outcomes and experiences in school.

Bringing Research into Practice

Case Studies

RTI has partnered with 32 school districts across North Carolina through an Education Stabilization Fund grant from the U.S. Department of Education that was awarded to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. This grant is referred to as "Rethink Education," and it provides technical assistance to schools as they prepare for future learning disruptions by incorporating blended learning practices into their curriculums and instructional models.

Greene County Schools Case Study

7

Number of Schools

3,000

Number of Students

20,211

Community Size

$45,766

23.3% persons in poverty

Median Household Income

77.6%

with high school diploma or higher;
10.8% Bachelor's degree or higher

Modal Education Attainment

28 minutes

mean travel time to work

Commuting Patterns, Physical and Virtual

76.7

per square mile

Density of Population

population density decreased from 80.3 to 76.7 people per square mile in the past 10 years (2010–2020)

In and Out Migration Trend

about 20 miles from Wilson, Kinston, Greenville, and Goldsboro

Proximity to Urbanized Areas

74.7%

of households with internet or broadband access

Degree of Physical or Virtual Isolation

manufacturing, health care & social assistance, and construction

Economic Dependencies

Rural:
distant (42)*

Federal Rural Designation

*Notes: Rural – Distant (42): Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Green County Schools Case Study

Greene County Schools is a rural school district located in central-eastern North Carolina, about 20 miles on either side from Greenville, Kinston, Wilson, and Goldsboro. This tight-knit community has always valued community connections. Through research and evidence, GCS knows that leveraging these familial and community relationships can offer important support to students throughout their educational careers. Although GCS knows these relationships are crucial, there are also challenges they face being a rural community. Greene County is a bedroom community, where many of the people that live there travel to surrounding cities for work. Therefore, they knew their approach to community collaboration had to be unique, and they needed to learn what that approach should be by listening to their partners, families, community members, teachers, and administrators.

Professional Learning

In fall 2021, RTI began partnering with GCS through the Rethink Education grant with a focus on FACE. Initial steps focused on hearing from those with a vested interest in the students of Greene County. The synthesis of this input ultimately provided contributions that supported the construction of the family and student engagement arm of the 2022–2027 GCS strategic plan. To carry out this arm of the strategic plan, the partnership between RTI and GCS for the 2022–2023 school year focused on internal capacity building of administrators and beginning teachers and shared responsibility conversations with family and community members.

Ensuring that staff are ready to engage with families is the necessary first step when doing the work of increasing FACE (Henderson & Mapp, 2007). In partnership with RTI, GCS chose to focus on two particular groups when considering capacity building through professional learning: beginning teachers and administrators. Often, there is little if any instruction about family engagement offered to pre-service teachers during their teacher preparation program, whether through a traditional or alternative route. A cornerstone of family engagement research states that the responsibility for initiating engagement lies with the school, primarily the school leaders (Henderson et al., 2007). Focus groups were held in GCS to gather data on the state of teachers' and administrators' knowledge and beliefs of FACE. This data collection ensured professional learning was customized. During professional learning with administrators, there was an intentional focus on language that they could use to convey their expectations to teachers. With beginning teachers, multiple professional learning sessions were focused on effective communication strategies, understanding how to learn about family backgrounds through relationship building, knowing how to hold authentic academic conversations with families, and learning how to re-engage families that had become disconnected for a variety of reasons.

Community Collaboration

While the capacity of beginning teachers and administrators in GCS was being built, RTI also partnered with GCS to have formally facilitated in-person Community Conversations with family and community members about the new strategic plan. While input about the strategic plan was provided from the community during the 2021–22 school year, GCS held another round of "Community Conversations" during the 2022–23 school year to build partnerships around the implementation of the strategic plan. Family and community members shared myriad ideas on how they could engage with the schools and successfully support each of the five strategic plan arms. The conversations of the year prior were continued with a renewed focus on shared responsibility and partnership, ultimately leading to the community workshop facilitated by RTI on Saturday, March 18, 2023.

In the 2023–24 school year, RTI and GCS will continue to provide professional learning to build the capacity of beginning teachers and administrators on FACE. To support the sustainability of the work, additional focus will be placed on identifying key GCS personnel who will lead the district- and school-wide efforts by integrating FACE into school improvement plans. This will ultimately solidify FACE work into the future of GCS.

> One of the things RTI has helped us realize is that we can't continue to apply old solutions to new problems. So, we're coming up with new and creative and innovative ways for us as a small district to tackle these new issues that we're facing.
>
> **Dr. Rodney McNeill, Executive Director of Human Capital, Greene County Schools**

Columbus County Schools Case Study

13

Number of Schools

5,300

Number of Students

49,885

Community Size

$40,562

23.4% persons in poverty

Median Household Income

84%

with high school diploma or higher;
14.1% Bachelor's degree or higher

Modal Education Attainment

28 minutes

mean travel time to work

Commuting Patterns, Physical and Virtual

54

per square mile

Density of Population

population density decreased from 62 to 54 people per square mile in the past 10 years (2010–2020)

In and Out Migration Trend

Whiteville (largest city in the county), about 50 miles from Wilmington and Myrtle Beach

Proximity to Urbanized Areas

75.3%

of households with internet or broadband access

Degree of Physical or Virtual Isolation

agriculture (soybeans, corn, peanuts, vegetables), manufacturing (textiles, food processing, lumber), healthcare, and education

Economic Dependencies

Rural: distant (42)*

Federal Rural Designation

*Notes: Rural – Distant (42): Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an Urbanized Area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urban Cluster.

Columbus County Schools Case Study

Columbus County, founded in 1808, is a quaint, rural community located in the southeastern part of North Carolina. It is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and offers a mix of natural beauty, historical significance, and economic opportunities in agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, and education. The 13 schools that make up Columbus County Schools (CCS) are filled with the memories of many generations of families that have attended. When walking the halls of CCS schools, at the morning carpool, or at local restaurants, it is evident that staff members know their families by name and greet each other with neighborly warmth. Generational relationships are reflected in the conversations one might overhear in CCS: for example, "Your grandma was in my class." Many CCS students return as teachers and leaders in the five elementary, two K–8 schools, two middle, and four high schools.

CCS designed and adopted a strategic plan centered on blended learning after the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing their FACE. RTI began partnering with CCS in fall 2021 to assist in making their family engagement priority of their strategic plan come to life. Actions in this priority area included hosting bi-annual Superintendent Town Halls, administering family surveys, and planning for more accessible communications strategies.

Leadership Coaching

The partnership began when CCS sought out research and evidence-based strategies to effectively implement their strategic plan goals. District Leaders in Columbus County hold multiple roles, unlike district leaders in larger school districts who may have one area of focus. Mr. Kelly Jones sought support in building authentic, transparent, family engagement in Columbus County. He holds the roles of Communications Director, Arts Director, and Family and Community Engagement Coordinator, among additional responsibilities. There were two steps that kicked off the partnership: a family survey and continuous improvement coaching cycles for district leaders focused on the structure and planning of community Town Hall meetings. The leadership coaching partnership included many opportunities for reflection, feedback, and co-creation of next steps, including meeting the goal of increasing points of access to participate and engage in town halls.

Data Collection. District leadership knew that they were not reaching as many families as they would like with district-wide, school-wide, and individual teacher communication. In response to data that showed missed opportunities to connect with Spanish-speaking families, RTI created a bilingual family survey for all CCS families that centered on communication method preferences, desired topics for communication, relationships with schools, and desired opportunities to build strong family partnerships.

Example questions from the family survey:

1. **Which 2 communication methods do you find to be most helpful and clear?** / ¿Cuales 2 métodos de comunicación le resultan más útiles y claros? (text, CCS Connect App, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, phone calls, emails, newsletters, letters in the mail)
2. **How would you describe your engagement with your child 's school?** (Engagement is defined as strong relationships between families and schools, open and frequent two-way communication, school visits to home or family visits to schools, etc.) / ¿Cómo describiría su nivel de compromiso con la escuela de su hijo? (Esta relación se define como relaciones sólidas entre las familias y las escuelas, comunicación bidireccional abierta y frecuente, visitas escolares a los hogares o visitas familiares a las escuelas, etc.) (excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, do not have one)
3. **What opportunities would you like to see to engage with CCS as a community?** (Think about the whole Columbus Community together, chances to build relationships and support students.) / ¿Qué oportunidades le gustaría ver para participar en CCS como comunidad? (Piense en toda la comunidad de Columbus juntos, oportunidades para construir relaciones y apoyar a los estudiantes.)

The survey was administered at the beginning, middle, and end of the year to compare results and see growth in communication and relationships and to seek feedback from families. After each administration, RTI disaggregated the data and crafted comparison reports for leaders to quickly view changes in data, reflect, and determine the adjustments needed to district-level communications and engagement practices. For example, findings show that more families are preferring text messages for personalized communication and robo-calls for the sharing of weekly, school-wide information. As a result, administrators discussed ways to adjust their practices to leverage texts and weekly calls.

Town Halls. Columbus County hosts bi-annual Superintendent Town Halls to provide an inviting space to share updates and be open to community feedback and questions. CCS district leaders wanted a thought partner to discuss their approach to, format of, and marketing of these events. RTI used a continuous improvement cycle. RTI supported leaders in the planning of the Town Hall (logistics, approach), collected data during the Town Hall (what questions were asked, who spoke, and how many virtual and in-person participants attended), facilitated meetings to study the data, and determined how to adjust the approach to Town Hall meetings. This process occurred after each Town Hall throughout the partnership, as each one took a different form to determine which format would work best for their rural community members. Each Town Hall progressively garnered additional participants.

Approaches explored included the following:

- Superintendent-led central location with broadcasting on Facebook and school website
- Superintendent-led high school location and broadcasting on Facebook, YouTube, and school website
- Multiple voices to share initiatives; moving to a school location in a different part of the county; streamed on Facebook, YouTube, and school website
- Multiple voices to facilitate and share/lead topics; satellite sessions at all schools; broadcasting on Facebook, YouTube, and school website

In partnership with RTI, Columbus County School district leaders had a few key takeaways. First, family engagement goes beyond Town Hall meetings. Leaders wanted to focus on building ongoing relationships with families at the district, school, and teacher levels. Second, a few key questions were raised throughout the coaching sessions: What is the purpose of our Town Hall meetings? What makes it a meeting you can't miss? How can town halls be an opportunity to have families gather together and talk to one another about current age-appropriate topics about their children? What support might district-wide staff need to build strong, ongoing partnerships with families?

To support sustainability and the district strategic plan for the 23–24 school year, Mr. Jones and RTI plan to co-facilitate professional learning sessions with principals focused on strategies that will support them in empowering their staff to build strong relationships with families. Professional learning will also be offered to new teachers about high-impact strategies for family engagement centered on student learning and growth. Now that there is a well-established feedback loop for working to improve the engagement with families and community members at the district level, building the capacity of the school staff, teachers and administrators will amplify the importance of building strong partnerships between CCS and its community.

> [RTI] came into our schools and they saw what we needed, specifically with where we were. It was very tailored and, I'll be honest, I've been in education a long time - this is my 28th year - and this has been one of the most remarkable relationships that I've ever experienced because they were invested in us. They cared about where we were and where we wanted to go and they helped us every single step of the way."
>
> **Kelly Jones, Arts Education/Public Information Coordinator, Columbus County Schools**

RTI's Approach to Family Engagement

At RTI, we have crafted our approach to be specifically applicable to the different needs of our clients, depending on their location and demographic. Within the two case studies, FACE took many steps and continues to take steps toward meaningful engagement. In GCS, there are threads of strategic planning and being responsive to community input, while also supporting the internal capacity building through professional learning and focusing on what was heard from the community. In CCS, data collection and feedback cycles are informative in deciding how to best hear from families and community members during town halls. Throughout the work in both districts, RTI has experienced that seeking feedback and being responsive furthers trust and relationship building, which ultimately positively impacts student success.

When we are considering the work of engaging with families and communities, there are distinct characteristics about rural communities that need to be considered. Ensuring that we take the time to learn about the "community size, density of population, proximity to urbanized areas, economic dependencies, median household income, modal educational attainment, and commuting patterns (physical and virtual alike)" (Coladarci, 2007, p. 3) supports us in being responsive to our clients and their unique needs.

RTI's approach to FACE is student-centric, and RTI's work highlights the **importance of interconnectedness and partnerships** between families, schools, and the community to support student success.

Beliefs

We agree with the research on family engagement conducted by Henderson & Mapp (2007) and Mapp & Bergman (2021). Therefore, we believe the following:

Educators can make family engagement part of their daily practice to ensure students can reach their full potential.

Meaningful FACE happens when authentic, two-way communication occurs to value all expertise and assets families and educators bring.

There is a shared responsibility between and among schools, families, and the community for the academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and physical development of children.

Family engagement is fostered through deliberate, intentional, and culturally responsive systems and structures that are embraced by the whole school community.

(paraphrased from Henderson & Mapp, 2007 and Mapp & Bergman, 2021)

These beliefs are essential to meaningful FACE. Through our work, it is evident that shifts in culture do not happen quickly or after one professional learning session. Meaningful family engagement takes a commitment and sustained support by educators to take the first steps toward building relationships, systems, and structures to engage and partner with families and the community. RTI partners with schools and districts to support implementation while providing coaching and professional learning to amplify and enhance FACE strategies.

RTI recognizes the difference between family involvement and family engagement.

Family involvement typically refers to participation in school systems or activities that support families as the primary caregiver and nurturer of student development.

Family engagement refers to ongoing, goal-driven relationships with families and school staff. These mutual relationships support students and families individually and collectively. Family involvement is part of this larger construct.

(Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002)

Seeing engagement as a daily practice means embracing the family–school partnership as an indispensable component of student success and school improvement (Mapp & Berman, 2021, p. 8). Ensuring a shared definition of engagement supports the work.

Our services, including coaching and professional learning, help our clients reach their FACE goals through the following:

1. Developing mindsets and beliefs
2. Building family partnerships
3. Building community partnerships
4. Developing a welcoming culture and climate

For rural communities, the physical distance between people and resources might be most prominent. The literature has showcased strategies that connect rural community members as partners to support student success. The case studies show that although the physical layout of a rural community may present challenges to connecting, meaningful engagement can effectively happen with the right efforts, skills, and steps in place. Both case studies highlight all four service areas included in our approach.

Rural communities are the home of the majority of students in the United States (Coladarci, 2007), and they deserve the attention of researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to find ways to best support their education. Family engagement is necessary for student success, but rural communities show us that they need unique approaches to this meaningful strategy.

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