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The Race, Social Class, and Place-Based Gap in Rural Turnaround Policy: A Policy Brief

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School turnaround administrators and policymakers must consider a community's history of reform, social inequities, and cultural and place-based capital in the strategic design and implementation of school turnaround policy. One-third of American public schools reside in rural contexts (Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Still, rural school enrollment outpaces urban and suburban school contexts (Mette, 2014). People of color represented 24% of the rural American population, and between 2010 and 2020, that percentage increased by 3.5% nationwide (Rowlands & Love, 2021). In particular, Texas currently serves over 900,000 rural students (Dick, 2017) with minorities representing 44% of rural students. Each year Texas nearly doubles this number as the state experiences an increase of 30,000 rural students annually. The increase in rural school enrollment has created additional educational challenges for rural communities, which are already challenged to retain effective teachers and administrators and need more access to educational resources like textbooks, technology, and career and technology programs (Johnson, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). Thus, the growing enrollment of people of color in rural schools suggests that more investigation into how rural, working-poor communities of color experience school turnaround is necessary (Strange et al., 2012). In this article, I make a case for additional scholarly literature that examines the intersectionality between rurality, race, and poverty to understand the experiences of people of color in rural educational setting,

and as stakeholders of school turnaround policy, their perspective, and the implications of these perspectives on how we study the systemic barriers in turnaround policy.

An Overview of Turnaround Policy

In 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan coined School Turnaround as the Obama Administration's approach to rapidly improving America's lowest-performing schools (Calkins et al., 2007; Peck & Reitzug, 2013). School turnaround is a high-stakes school reform policy that allocated \$3.5 billion in School Improvement Grants (SIG) to failing schools to improve student achievement on state-mandated standardized tests (Duke, 2006; Trujillo & Renee, 2015). The interventions strategies of urban school turnaround can include personnel replacement, standardized curricula, teaching initiatives, and budgetary overhauls (Duke, 2015; Peck & Reitzug, 2018). Since its conception, school turnaround has been implemented most in underserved, urban, and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities (Kutash et al., 2010; Backstrom, 2019). To date, school turnaround has been regarded as vastly unsuccessful, which has resulted in the closure of urban schools in urban metropolises like Chicago, New York City, and Detroit (Ewing, 2020). Wright & Kim (2020) investigated how turnaround's undemocratic practice reified deficit discourses about a school community. The authors attributed the failures of school turnaround to undemocratic, racialized practices of turnaround leadership that led to community resistance. The authors maintain that redistributing the community's access to civic participation in schooling can draw out biases and deficit discourses in school turnaround policy (Wright & Tabrizi, 2019). As a result, the literature shows that

turnaround policy acts contrary to the unique needs and perspectives of people of color by excluding the community's historical and cultural identity as a mediating factor in achievement (Heilig et al., 2013). The implications of the findings in scholarly literature point toward a need to incorporate a community's history of reform, social inequities, and cultural and place-based capital in the design and implementation of school turnaround policy. In the forthcoming sections, I will show that the analysis of the cultural knowledge in rural contexts of color is needed to improve the design of school turnaround as the intersectionality of race, poverty, and the politics of place.

Literature Review

Studies about the relationship between the Black experience and rural education have shed light on ways to empower students of color in rural contexts. For example, In Volume 37, Issue 7 of the *Journal of Research in Rural Education (JRRE)*, Joubert III and Lensmire (2021) guest edited a special issue that explored the relationship between Black Lives Matter and Rural Education. In the volume, several scholars examined the academic achievement of Black folx in rural areas. Their studies investigated and conceptualized the intersectionality of historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral education debts that mediate the schooling of rural Black folx. The authors examine how their experiences reveal the intersectionality of rurality, cultural values, and educational inequities. They also interpret these experiences to conceptualize culturally sustaining practices for improving achievement outcomes in rural Black communities.

Nichols (2021) studied the experiences of three generations of Black women schooled in the rural South. The

study found that networks of "nurturing and supportive" educators transform the moral debt experienced by Black girls in rural settings. The author found that when rural Black girls had nourishing and supportive teachers, they challenged the moral debt or the traditional teacher-student relationships that perceive Black girls' nurturing as a threat to societal values and interests. The study's findings show that teachers who intentionally honored the identity of Black girls contributed to rural Black girls' aspirations and motivations to pursue postsecondary careers. Harris (2021) maintained that when rural economies have histories involving racial inequities, increasing students' knowledge of their families' economic histories disrupts the reproduction of economic inequality. The findings demonstrated that the situated community knowledge of their familial capital positively shaped students' scholarship and motivation. Next, Grant-Panting (2021) transformed their rural community by contributing to its capacity-building, civic organizing, and participation in civic life. Their findings show that empowering parents and school community members to see themselves as intellectuals contributing to local schooling as a coalition could counter rural sociopolitical debts. Finally, Niño & Perez-Diaz (2021) found that teachers could transform the historical debt that situated the educational experiences of Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) when teachers learned of their students' historical and familial backgrounds and used this knowledge to tailor their curriculum and instruction toward their student's sociocultural needs, habits, and desires as mediated by local historical contingencies. Together, these studies show the accumulation of rural educational debt that occurred in the past and outside the school campus, yet mediate and directly impact students' schooling

motivations, participation, and activism. Lastly, these studies show that in designing policies to unearth cultural deficiencies, these experiences can be situated as capital and implemented using data-driven decision-making to increase the transformational capacity of school turnaround policy.

Mette & Stanoch (2016) reflect upon several important implications for engaging school reform in rural Native American communities. The study follows one rural Native American school system receiving turnaround funding to provide one-to-one technology to students and their families. The authors maintain that sociopolitical and economic investments in technology to expand rural Native American students' access to technology did not lead to improved achievement outcomes. Instead, the authors found that adding technology without drawing connections between technological convenience and the local conventions of culture inhibited the possibility of innovation. The authors maintain that integrating the use of tech with the lived experience, cultural norms or needs of the community could have increased the likelihood of achieving tech-related learning goals while providing rigor and increasing student motivation. The study of the community's experience shows how turnaround policy is culture and color evasive. Color evasion ignores the intergenerational effects of history, economics, and sociopolitical and moral decisions on people of color (Annamma & Morrison, 2016). The scholarly implications of this study show that the communities' racialized, economic, and place-based experiences are necessary to identify inequalities in turnaround policy.

Analysis

The studies above present a cautionary tale of the consequences of throwing money at communities of color without understanding how local culture informs cultural values and beliefs about schooling. First, they show that identifying educational debts and forms of cultural capital can be valuable, powerful tools to mediate technology integration. Next, they exemplify how examining the interventions used by turnaround leadership were shaped by rural moral values about relationship-building. The authors maintained that the community responded better to turnaround policy designs that took a broadly collaborative approach to developing positive relationships between multiple school stakeholders, including the school leaders, students, teachers, the community, and the educational agency. In doing so, the voices of students, parents, and community members lend valuable capital to the turnaround process via insight into how social contingencies like nationality, income, and place mediate the schooling environment. Their findings imply that top-down unilateral approaches are less effective and hurt the development of a positive school climate (Mette, 2013). These studies show that school turnaround policy cannot approach underserved communities with generalized objective practices. Instead, culture and curriculum must be woven together to improve a particular community's educational inequities. Thus, the education debt and community cultural wealth yield significant knowledge related to the design of school turnaround.

Discussion

The educational debt and community cultural wealth theories are lenses that can further our understanding of the deficiencies

in rural school turnaround policies. Ladson-Billings (2006) defines the education debt as the "forgone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low-income kids, which leads to a variety of social problems that require ongoing public investment (p.5)." In addition, Ladson-Billings cites that the exclusion of Black folx cultural history and moral, economic, and sociopolitical values have contributed to furthering the achievement gap. Yosso (2005) conceptualized community cultural wealth as communities of color using situated cultural knowledge to resist inequities caused by racism and other forms of oppression. Community cultural wealth instructs educators to get to know their students' social, familial, linguistic, aspirational, resistance, and navigational capital and to anchor these perspectives within the design and implementation of educational reform policy. This conceptual framework can be used as a policy analysis tool to identify and collect the situated knowledge of a community for a more equitable redesign of turnaround policy interventions that target academic and non-academic factors that impact academic achievement. In the case of rural schools, knowledge of the economic and sociopolitical debt would design a school turnaround policy that invests in rural economic development, broadband, health, and recreational/social activity. Although these investments occur outside the immediate setting of a school campus, rural turnaround policy must address these design deficiencies to generate the desired impact and effectiveness of school turnaround. Thus, place-based research framed by a community's educational debt and community cultural wealth can reveal the specific inequities that comprise turnaround policy.

Implications and Recommendations for Teachers, Leaders, and Policymakers

For teachers, the trends suggest that in-service and pre-service teachers benefit from sociopolitical research on the historical development of their communities. To conduct the work of school turnaround reform, the collection of teacher lore (Schubert & Ayers, 1992) and teacher's reflective practice (Dewey, 1910) can help to understand how school turnaround policies mediate classroom practices, school culture, and relationships. For example, Schwarz and Alberts (1998) explored the relationship between teacher education, professional development, and school reform. The text is a collection of teachers' stories and the author's reflections on how the stories reveal embedded issues with contemporary educational theories and practices. Teacher education programs that engage students in similar sociopolitical research before entering the classroom may increase the likelihood that teachers can identify color-evasive school policy patterns and curriculums and leverage their knowledge to advocate for the best education for their students. Similarly, for teacher education programs with professional development schools (PDS), establishing networks with local rural school districts could lead to more mentorship in this area. In addition, it could foster additional interest in studying the factors that produce solid and successful relationships between PDS schools and rural schools and districts.

For school turnaround leaders and policymakers, the trends suggest leadership must take a more community-based participatory research approach (Lewin, 1946) to design and implement school turnaround. School turnaround leadership must have philosophical underpinnings prioritizing social justice, equity,

collaboration, and relationship-building to succeed within low-income rural school communities of color (Pazey et al., 2014). In particular, the adoption of Alain LeRoy Locke's theory of cultural pluralism as a practical sociocultural framework would show how cultural difference in curriculum and instruction impact the schooling outcomes of various minoritized groups (Locke, 1917, as cited in Harris, 1989). Additional research should address the social and cultural contingencies that leadership can identify, plan, and implement to effectively serve historically marginalized groups. Community Oral history is one area of qualitative methodology that could amplify the voices of culturally diverse groups. (Charlton et al., 2007). Such knowledge would yield valuable research-informed data to redesign turnaround policy to mitigate these schooling communities' challenges.

Future Scholarly Studies

The implications of the current trends in rural education research suggest that there is a need for additional scholarly research to examine the intersectionality of a rural school community's sociopolitical circumstances and experience. Moreover, people of color must tell these storied experiences, and their stories must catalyze policy redesign. Lack of understanding of a school community's particular culture reproduces White learning norms that are exclusionary to the needs, desires, and cultural knowledge that mediate the schooled lives of minoritized communities. Future studies should engage the stakeholders of rural school communities and encourage them to remember and critique their experiences under school turnaround. Documentation of current school turnarounds will contribute data for future analysis of America's educational

past. These experiences can stimulate changes to policies related to academic performance, curriculum initiatives, family and community engagement, leadership effectiveness, use and relevance of mixed methods data, teacher quality and reconstitution, and school climate. As demonstrated in the study of a rural Native American school turnaround, this perspective can help turnaround leaders understand the effect of school turnaround interventions in a changing social context.

Moreover, their voices encourage students, teachers, parents, community advocates, turnaround leaders, and policymakers to re-theorize their role and responsibility in improving educational reform policy. The voices of communities of color are especially critical to schools and districts that have no choice but to improve academic achievement outcomes or face the consequences of school turnaround failure: school closure. The findings of such future studies can show how dominant narratives are reproduced through policy and the transformational capacity of leveraging the experiences of those subject to school reform to improve policy. These dominant narratives can also be analyzed by scholarship that explores the connection between terms like 'urban' and 'rural' and how they are used as code to express areas of high concentrations of People of Color and White folks. For example, 'Rural' can be used as a racial euphemism to communicate high concentrations of White folks in a geographic area (Illing, 2017). Such a broad yet racial and geographically narrow definition can obscure that people of color experience unique educational inequalities in rural communities. Scholarship in these areas could foster connections between the policy design and implementation in urban and rural contexts serving communities of color.

Conclusion

This article aims to make the case that considering a community's history of school reform, social inequities, and cultural and place-based capital must be in the strategic design and implementation of school turnaround policy to challenge culturally inequitable distributions of education policy. The key to constructing a textured analysis of this body of knowledge is collecting and analyzing stakeholder experiences and perspectives on school turnaround. Multiple levels of school community membership, such as students, teachers, parents, and community coalitions, must understand the range of capital and history mediating school turnaround. Collecting this situated cultural knowledge and the social inequities facing poor, rural schools of color increase understanding of the complexities that comprise their experience, and when used as qualitative data to drive decision-making, it can increase the transformational capacity of school turnaround policy interventions. This area of scholarship sheds light on how color evasion in policy ignores the incongruencies between a policy and its cultural constituents to reproduce educational inequities. The study of educational debt and its reconceptualization as community cultural wealth in policy demonstrate that the potential for improving academic achievement is readily available and on the table. However, we must learn to possess cultural humility to recognize the strengths of cultural differences and unearth their potential.

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