



The sun sets over the Columbia River Gorge near Vantage, one of many rural communities in Washington.

# Identifying the Needs of **RURAL SCHOOLS**

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### PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Creating a Culture, Ensuring School Safety, Improving Instruction, Closing the Gap*

**R**ural communities are abundant throughout eastern Washington. The school districts located in these areas are as diverse as the communities they serve and the students they teach. Each community has their own unique story and everyone in town is able to share the customs, histories, and events that have taken place through time. Rural schools are the hubs that bring people together: when students actively participate in school activities, they are an extension of their community, and provide of sense of family and well-being.

There are a number of advantages of attending and working in a rural



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school. They also come with a set of challenges and needs every rural school administrator must work to overcome. Inclusion is one of those needs.

Isolation for school administrators is not a new phenomenon. Many elementary principals are alone in their building, but in almost all cases, they have a colleague nearby or in a neighboring district to connect with. Small-town principals don't have this. They might work in a K-12 building and the nearest school is a couple hours away.

We all know collaboration and a team of networked school administrators is a critical aspect of success in the job. A lack of collaboration often leads to burnout, loss of job satisfaction, and ultimately, leaving for something else. When a principal leaves a small community, it creates a negative, lasting effect. Reducing isolation and its effects on the school administrator is critical to the success of not only the school, but the whole community.

Equity is another challenge small schools face. When we apply the

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equity lens to education, it needs to be applied to all schools across the state and not just those with certain zip codes or from certain geographic areas. Equity, in the simplest of terms, means different schools or students need different supports to maximize their likelihood of success. Small communities realized this years ago.

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Are the students in Oroville any less deserving than the students in Bellevue? We all know the answer is no, but current funding and teacher recruitment efforts say otherwise. Should students in Lamont have the same access to college scholarships from Boeing as the students living in the 206 area code? There are countless other examples of “equity” inequalities existing between small rural communities and larger metropolitan areas. We must continue to expose these gaps and work towards eliminating them. Small communities must continue to advocate for their kids.

Regardless of area code and the feeling of isolation, the geography of small schools can be an obstacle. Because of the geography and isolation, school leaders and members of small communities face unique challenges attracting high-quality candidates to work in their schools. Hiring is often harder. The need for a school administrator to continue speaking with legislators from their district is critical. Stories of the school district’s needs must be shared and conversations around staffing

and recruitment must take place. Recruitment efforts need to increase, as well as the ability to retain quality staff.

If you visit a school in a small community, you will notice people love living, working, and teaching in this setting. Students see the needs and can identify the inequalities, but choose not to let it deter them in their academic pursuits. They are able to achieve in spite of the inequities between rural and urban school settings. We must find a way to increase opportunities, do a better job of networking rural administrators, and create incentives to recruit and retain talented educators. The first step is reaching out and telling your story. I’d love to hear from you and work together to find solutions. Shoot me an email. I’m here to listen. ■



Badge of honor: A car wash is in order after traveling the state to visit rural schools.

*Editor’s Note: Scott officially starts his new role for AWSP on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Check out the News Briefs on page 6 for more information on Scott and his new role.*

The Gorillas of Davenport.

