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ABSTRACT

A case study of Oneida High School (Oneida, Tennessee) in December 1997 examined influences and unique circumstances that sustained the school in the face of possible closure and enabled it to "flourish." The study included structured interviews with over 70 individuals in the school and community, focus groups, and informal conversations with local citizens. Oneida is a relatively poor community located in rural Scott County in north central Tennessee; the high school enrolls about 340 students. Oneida Special School District (OSSD) was established in 1915 and functions as a "choice" for families in the surrounding county district. Sections of this report cover the threat to the survival of OSSD, response by grassroots organizers and local elites, and restructuring of local leadership; what the community expects from the school; life in the school from the students' viewpoint; and the work lives of teachers. Findings suggest that the school has survived and flourished because of community commitment based on values of family, hard work, and caring for others; community expectations are that students may leave to discover a "vocation" elsewhere, but will return with new skills to benefit the community; and there is willingness among wealthy residents and businesses to provide supplemental funding. In sustaining the high school, the community articulates a view of the outside world that reflects respect for local perspectives and puts local purposes before global ones. (Contains 34 notes.) (SV)

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CHAPTER 4

Community as Tacit Curriculum: A Case Study of Oneida High School, Oneida, Tennessee

CRAIG B. HOWLEY AND HOBART L. HARMON¹

Three researchers from the Appalachia Educational Laboratory visited the Oneida Special School District (OSSD) in Oneida, Tennessee, in December 1997. During the visit, we met with over 70 individuals. The meetings took the form of structured interviews, with questions based on the master protocol developed for the overall LNP project. Three of our meetings were conducted as focus groups with up to 15 participants. We also held informal conversations with local citizens ("person in the street" encounters). We talked to teachers (current and retired), administrators (current and retired), athletic directors, school staff (cafeteria manager, custodian, secretary), school board members (current and retired), business owners, working people, civic leaders and officials, newspaper editors, labor leaders, ministers, social service workers, and youth leaders.

From these sources, we assembled data that support the story that follows. Though intense, our visit was nonetheless short; many interesting issues that would intrigue a rural school ethnographer could not be examined.² Our purposes (as described in the previous chapter) were more limited. Thus, we have a particular story to tell, or rather the convergence of many individual remarks to interpret, in relaying the story of Oneida High School in Scott County, Tennessee.

Our story is not a parable. We do not insist on telling it to convey any lessons about how to replicate the OSSD success. Indeed, we suspect that the real lesson is negative; *not* in the sense that OSSD presents a poor example—by no means! The state of the district seemed, in fact, miraculous to us, particularly in light of our collective experiences with school districts in central Appalachia.

Still, it is the “miraculous” quality that constitutes the negative lesson. We mean that policymakers should not *expect* to replicate a miracle. Oneida is what it is by virtue of the way in which it strives to be true to itself. How a community might “replicate” the success of Oneida’s struggle to do that is not even a question to pose without asking if the community holds dear the things that Oneida does, and if the community has anything akin to the resources with which that poor, rural community is so blessed. It also is important to keep in mind that success is cumulative—and temporary.

Instead of replicating miracles, wise policy would facilitate the conditions to achieve *different* miracles. The results of this approach to policy are not possible to guarantee. But it is important for policymakers to note that the kinds of policies that *do* aim at certainty generally fall short of promises, and usually *well short* of the promises initially made for them.

Oneida, then, presents a unique story, and its “lessons” for the rest of the world should not be overdrawn. We begin the story by describing the heart of the matter.

The Heart of the Matter

Time and again we asked our hosts to tell us how the community was included in the curriculum of Oneida High School in the Oneida Special School District (OSSD). We were curious about the issue because of our conviction that actual living communities ought somehow to constitute the core purposes of schooling.³ We were not looking for any particular response, nor did we have a critical sense of what might constitute better or worse answers in Scott County. Indeed, we weren’t there to pass judgment.

The answer we got was a familiar one: guest speakers, field trips, and local oral traditions. Many schools are doing these sorts of things.

The answer was, in essence, an admission that *within the formal curricu-*

lum, study of and student engagement in the community was not unusually strong. Yet, over the course of our visit, our hosts rephrased and answered our question on different terms—*their own terms*. Their own answer to their own implicit question (perhaps, “What do we owe our children and why?”) suggested that the schooling experienced by high school kids in the OSSD put community very much at the heart of the enterprise.

We use the word “*heart*” to indicate an affectionate disposition; that is, an attachment to the city of Oneida and to Scott County, Tennessee, that was widespread among those with whom we spoke. This disposition has much to do with the continuing survival of the district and its high school, the particularity of its place in north central Tennessee, and the contradictory political economic circumstance of the community as it confronts the coming decades. We shall describe this attachment later on, but first let’s place the town of Oneida in the context of Scott County and Tennessee.

Oneida in Scott County and Tennessee

Scott County must be one of the most historically unusual counties in the United States. Original settlers were veterans of the American Revolution who were awarded grants of land on the Cumberland Plateau as reward for their service. The names of these families are noted on a historical plaque in Huntsville, the county seat. Several local residents and educators with whom we met bore these family names. This detail is not quite so unusual as the remarkable fact that when the Civil War erupted and Tennessee seceded from the Union, the leaders of Scott County acted to secede from Tennessee!

According to a member of the local historical society, the county sent about 300 recruits north to join the Union army and about 60 recruits south to join the Confederate army. Since then, Scott County has been a Republican county (though voter rolls are now about evenly split between Republicans and Democrats, according to those with whom we spoke). Both newspapers remain Republican. “In fact,” said one informant, “Scott County should have been in Kentucky.” This comment alluded to the early surveying error that set the Tennessee state border 10 minutes further north than ordered. The town of Oneida is itself divided by the intended parallel of $36^{\circ}30'$.⁴

Perhaps this history accounts in some strange measure for the special status of the Oneida school district. The first “high school” in Scott County was established in Oneida, the center of population, in 1901. The building that housed the school had three rooms in which all grades, including high school, were taught. According to the local historian of Scott County, this building had opened its doors in 1859 on Main Street,

But this old two-story structure was torn down [some-time] a new, two-room one built on the same grounds . . . [and] soon a third room was added. . . . It was the first home of Oneida High School. From 1901 to 1920 the high school curriculum was taught there, and the pupils went as far in it as there were courses offered.⁵

In 1915, Oneida educators succeeded in having a bill passed in the state senate that established an independent school district, “The Oneida High School of Scott County.” Despite the fact that the *high school* was the focus of Senate Bill 1064, the town continued to operate a combined K-12 school and constructed a new building for it in 1920. In 1924, however, Oneida erected a separate high school building. This construction was followed by additions to both the elementary school and high school in 1931. Fire destroyed the elementary school in 1944. New structures were built in 1948 and 1962. The present high school building is of very recent construction.

From 1915 onward, the district opened its enrollment to eligible students across all of Scott County.⁶ Funding is apportioned to the schools of Scott County through the county commission on a per pupil basis. The residents of the district also tax themselves additionally to support the district, a measure permissible under Tennessee laws and the laws of virtually all states. Again, Oneida is the center of economic life in Scott County. Yet, far from being affluent by national standards, the town, as well as the county, would be classified conversely as impoverished.⁷

The local structure of poverty. According to the 1990 decennial census, about 10 percent of families in the town of Oneida (and the county of Scott, as well) had a median family income of less than half the poverty level, and about 30 percent in both the town and the county were living at or below the poverty level. At the same time, about 47

percent of the population in Oneida town, as compared to about 36 percent of those in the county (minus the town), enjoyed family incomes at least twice that which defines the poverty line. This modest difference in income between a rural town and the surrounding rural countryside is common throughout rural America, though the gap is probably more extreme in many places.

The special circumstance of the OSSD within Scott County, however, probably tends to sharpen the natural economic distinctions prevailing between town and country. Relatively speaking, the OSSD operates in a somewhat less pinched context than does the Scott County School District (SCSD) which surrounds it. There is little difference in the percentages of enrolled children living in poverty—32 percent for the OSSD and 34 percent for the SCSD. The difference is more noticeable in terms of median incomes of families with children—about \$23,000 for families living within the OSSD boundaries and \$19,000 for families in the SCSD. The differences seem more dramatic still in terms of educational attainment. Among those living in the town of Oneida in 1990, about 45 percent of adults over age 25 had fewer than 12 years of schooling; for Scott County, it was about 55 percent. And, in Oneida, more than 15 percent of adults possessed at least a bachelor's degree. In the county, it was less than 5 percent. This proportion of college-educated adults puts Oneida in the 80th percentile of Tennessee districts, whereas 5 percent put the county at about the 10th percentile. The difference in educational attainment is therefore more dramatic than it seems at first blush.⁸

The data seem to support what we heard from those we interviewed—that Oneida is the economic and entrepreneurial hub of the county.⁹ The data suggest that years before the events about which we heard from local people, the OSSD probably benefitted from a tradition of engagement with its schools. The retired teachers, in fact, confirmed this in our talk with them. The local historian characterized the educators who initiated the OSSD in 1915 as “farsighted.”¹⁰ The long-term popular influence of a strong local middle class is part of the legacy of other Appalachian rural towns.¹¹ Oneida appears to have been more fortunate than some, and that good fortune is surely part of the story of its successful high school. It is important to keep in mind that we are talking about the sort of modest good fortune which enables a

community to make the most of the things and relationships at hand, rather than dramatic windfalls.

The Crisis and the Restructuring of Local Leadership

“The world moves on.” This was the classic message of Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher who wrote before Plato. Heraclitus observed that no one could “step twice into the same river.” The river (a metaphor for the world), flowed on and changed always. Not everyone has agreed with Heraclitus that change is the one constant in life, but for rural U. S. communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has been extraordinarily difficult to see the constants of rural life (closeness to kin, wildness, and community itself) for the perpetual and disrupting changes.

As in many rural places, economic crisis is a regular visitor to Scott County. Like many rural Appalachian places, Scott County’s economic history includes coal mining, as well as timber and oil and gas. First it was deep mines, then strip mines. By 1980, the mines were largely inactive and remain so today. The population in 1997 finally surpassed the 1980 figure, and, according to those we interviewed, the adjustment to a restructured economy has been difficult.

Though difficult, it has been done. Elsewhere in Appalachia, the adjustment has not been made. For example, in McDowell County, West Virginia, perhaps *the* major coal county in that state, the population declined 40 percent from 1980 to 1990 and an additional 13 percent from 1990 to 1997. The population in Scott County, by contrast, increased an estimated 7.8 percent from 1990 to 1997, about 3/7 from natural increase and the remainder from in-migration. Out-migration is no longer a phenomenon in Scott County, though it nevertheless remains a constant concern among those with whom we spoke.

The school crisis. Crises in local economies precipitate other crises: personal, familial, and organizational. For a time it seemed that the OSSD would not survive. According to one of our sources, part of the crisis that for a time threatened the continued existence of the district arose from the removal of a popular principal who was “demoted” to teacher status by a previous superintendent. This controversy was widely engaged by citizens, the newspaper, and educators. The commu-

nity, as in many such cases, was divided over the issue and considerable rancor persisted. The superintendency changed as a result.

The rancor put the continued existence of the OSSD into jeopardy as a number of issues could not be addressed due to the divisiveness. Our sources variously reported these issues to be the poor condition of school buildings, mediocre performance of sports teams, declining academic standards, low test scores, and poor staff morale. These are not uncommon challenges for schools, but the community perceived that these issues placed the continued existence of this independent district in jeopardy.¹² We did not ask the state department of education if the reported fears were justified, but the unusual response of the community (described next) substantiated the notion that the community was seriously worried.

The response. Whether the response began as a grassroots effort or as an organized call by the town's leaders is unclear. We would hazard the guess that the two efforts were, in any case, compatible. Initially, grassroots fund-raising efforts (bake sales, raffles, and so forth) were very lucrative events, raising *several hundred thousand* dollars intended merely to keep the schools operating. Town and district leaders also focused on securing the patronage of affluent benefactors. This campaign was led by the longtime owner of a local factory who actively recruited other donors. The prospective benefactors needed to be convinced that their patronage would not be given in vain. The success of the grassroots fund-raising ventures partly convinced the prospective donors. The commitment to finding, and, perhaps more importantly, to formally evaluating a new superintendent provided the rest of the successful argument to the donors. This process of evaluation entailed hiring the prospective superintendent to be the facilitator for the already-underway, locally-sponsored school improvement project.

The new OSSD leader. Mayfield Brown, the prospective new superintendent, arrived in the OSSD in the role of superintendent's helpmate. But he soon realized that his was a temporary role leading to the superintendency. A generous benefactor had promised support to the OSSD for 10 years at half a million dollars per year, with half of the funding contingent on improved academic results.

Brown is hardly a figure that urban educators would recognize. Not only is he a local native, but his family has held superintendencies for

generations. And in Tennessee, the superintendencies, until very recently, have been partisan *elected* positions. It is important to understand that Brown was not a resident of Oneida or even Scott County. He came from a nearby county. This gave him the happy circumstance of being an outsider (in that his connections to Oneida were not intense) and an insider (in that he knew well how things worked in places like Oneida). Furthermore, he came to a system that not only wanted to see improvement, but had secured independent funding to do it. Brown was, in fact, personally recruited to this mission by a former governor and high-ranking federal official whom he knew.

One of his first actions was to send a letter to the pastors of all 86 churches in Scott County (remember, the OSSD is open to all children in the county) asking them to pray for the success of the Oneida construction program. In his interview with us, he chuckled at the notion that the Lord had ensured his success, but at the same time it seemed that he appreciated the complex irony—personal and professional—of such an assertion.

The new leader's vision of a good school. Recent school improvement literature stresses the importance of a shared vision for the future. We therefore asked nearly everyone we talked with what they considered to be a good school. The answer we received from Brown was unique. He told us that the OSSD school board had asked him that question, and he refused to answer them. He said he thought that the community ought to provide the answer, and that his role should be to help them. Others described Brown as a listener, a thinker, a networker. To this day, he says, he frequents three coffee shops every morning, as each one caters to a unique section of the community.

Nonetheless, Brown told us what he is now working towards at OSSD.¹³ He aims to create the kind of educational system that would be acceptable to managerial workers from the outside; that is, to people in the national culture. This is an unusual goal to set alongside that of maintaining respect for the local community.

Evidence of What the Local Community Expects

Brown was phrasing his aims carefully when he used the word *acceptable*. He seemed to suggest the possibility of creating a system sufficiently cosmopolitan to satisfy newcomers, but not to the extent

that it violated local commitments and assumptions. The new buildings are very attractive, friendly places that suburban or rural communities anywhere would find pleasing. The high school program includes an increasing number of advanced placement courses, and there is a clear emphasis on preparation for college, though a minority of students are preparing to go directly to work after high school. Some of those we interviewed candidly told us that they thought the high school placed too great an emphasis on college preparation. But this standard is, in a sense, a legacy of the “special” quality of the OSSD. At the focus group we held for parents, a participant noted,

I think tradition has a lot to do with [Oneida High School flourishing]. . . . It goes back years and years . . . wanting the best and doing the best . . . They hire the best [teachers and administrators] . . . because tradition comes down through uncles, grandparents, great-grandparents, [people who] went to school here, and they’re still here, and [now] their grandchildren or their nephews or their own children are going [to Oneida High School].

Another parent said,

It’s always flourished. I mean, I was raised here. I graduated [from] Oneida. My parents were raised here, and both graduated from Oneida. It’s always been a status that if you wanted to do education, you hauled your kids to get them into Oneida.

In a sense, the OSSD has served Scott County as a rural school (district) of choice. *No one* with whom we spoke *ever* articulated the viewpoint that the SCSD (the county system) was an inferior system. Always, instead, they cited the positive attributes of the OSSD—smaller size, pride of the community, tradition of excellence. It is significant that the OSSD provides very little transportation. The district of about 1,200 students owns just three school buses. Most parents “haul” their kids back and forth to school. No one with whom we spoke complained of the lack of bus service, and several insisted that parents *ought* to provide transportation. More tacitly, we suspect, parents trade bus transport for a modicum of school choice. This may be especially true for the 60 percent of families who live outside the OSSD boundaries.¹⁴

The significance of current demographics is underscored by the following remark, also made by a parent in the focus group:

Oneida has consistently elected responsible board members who are educated . . . and interested in education. That's not true in many rural areas. . . . Oneida has always put forth first-class board members that have always been interested primarily in education.

The parents in the focus group meeting and elsewhere shared a sense of the unique circumstances that brought the OSSD into being. They also agreed with the assessment of the local historian that the “farsighted” character of those who established the district was a point of community pride among citizens.¹⁵ In some sense, Oneida has *inherited* exactly the vision that Mayfield Brown now articulates. It includes a shared evaluation of the relationship of the strong future to the past.

We easily concluded that the OSSD, and particularly its high school, though small, would be acceptable to a national clientele. Smallness, if associated with an adequate college-prep curriculum and attractive facilities, is seen as a distinct asset to parents aware of recent thinking about the virtues of small-scale schooling.¹⁶

The other side of the ledger, though, concerns the nature of the community as it imagines the school and holds palpable expectations of it. In our focus group with parents, we received a rapid stream of answers when we asked, “What is a good teacher? What do you want to see in a teacher?” These were the responses in the order they were offered

1. good morals
2. someone who can build, rather than tear down, character
3. someone who loves kids
4. responsible
5. ability to teach (some laughter that this was mentioned fifth)
6. we prefer married teachers
7. happy because they're here in Oneida
8. motivators
9. love their jobs

10. try new teaching ideas
11. participators (games, booster, volunteers)
12. someone who goes to church with us
13. if *we* hurt, we want *them* to hurt, too

These responses suggest to us a pattern of commitments that might characterize healthy small towns in many parts of rural America. Many of the statements reflect a traditional outlook that is hardly supportable any longer in cosmopolitan suburbs or big city districts. It seemed to us that the educators we interviewed understood and embraced these qualities.

Though they clearly thought it was important, citizens did *not* put academic achievement above all else. Something intangible—call it character, or being the kind of person who “gives back,” or who is *domestic*—was what they prized.¹⁷ Expertise, aggressiveness, and professionalism did not figure prominently in the language of those who spoke with us. They appreciated talent, entrepreneurial outlook, and having a trade or skill that could contribute to the community. Citizens also thought good sports teams affirmed and provided cause to celebrate this sense of the life-world.¹⁸

Despite the care taken to create a recognizably good school acceptable to well-educated outsiders, the school itself seemed to have a function that overshadowed its academic mission. As we heard it from many people, the school *should* prepare, and *was* preparing, students to live in the community and to imagine the good of the community. By community they meant principally the town of Oneida and its environs, but also, to some extent, Scott County, the region of the Cumberland Plateau, and Tennessee generally. We heard but scant mention of national or “global” purposes.

One of the researchers asked a “probe” question during a focus group. He asked what the town needed from its high school and what the state of Tennessee needed, and if there was a difference. Many people said that both the town and the state needed an excellent school. One person elaborated this viewpoint rather poignantly as follows:

I think Tennessee needs a lot and Oneida needs a lot.
... A big key, I think, is that we want those kids to go on to college or whatever they're doing [after high school] and *get their vocations* and we want them to

come back to Oneida. We don't want them to go to Nashville or Memphis or New York. We want them to come back to Oneida and live and be productive here! And I think that's what the state needs. We don't need our graduates going somewhere else. We need them staying in the state to benefit where they live. But Oneida needs to . . . keep moving forward and then bring opportunities for our students to be able to come back home.

From this vantage, the acceptability issue (imagining a local school that is "acceptable" to an outside managerial class) concerns the *explicit* preparation of young people both to leave and then to return (see "Life in the School" for students' views of this issue). This possibility has been raised by a number of writers on rural education, as well as the Rural School and Community Trust,¹⁹ and the adults in Oneida (both parents and educators) seem to be telling this story consistently to high school students. The entrepreneurial legacy in Oneida seems to offer real opportunities for the voluntary return of well-schooled youngsters. Because there are numerous businesses (nearly 300 in Scott County), a return is not a vague aspiration, but a distinct possibility. Among the Oneida citizens with whom we talked, the appeal and the likelihood of such a return is enhanced, rather than subverted, by a suitable postsecondary experience.

The bigger picture that citizens have in view encompasses the economic life of the town and the way schooling links the generations and the community together. A faith in the potential of this unbroken circle is likely grounded in the Christian practices of those 86 churches in the county. Hearty approval greeted the following remark at the parent focus group meeting:

I think another positive is the kids are still allowed to acknowledge God as God and not some myth, and they're allowed to worship God in their own way without being ridiculed.

This view is pervasive and resilient in Appalachia, and, doubtless, throughout much of rural America. However, it is not necessarily, to our minds, a mark of religious bigotry or intolerance. By law, state education agencies impose religious neutrality on schools.

At the local level in many places (and not just rural places), such neutrality almost always turns out to be a troublesome principle. In

those places where the faithful strongly adhere to one sect, that faith will surely be represented in the upbringing of children, especially outside the school, but inevitably within it as well, subtly or openly. Such a conclusion is only *logical*.²⁰ We would be saddened to learn that Jewish or Islamic newcomers received anything but a courteous (if guarded!) welcome from citizens in Oneida. We'd be dumbfounded, though, to hear that OSSD parents and educators abandoned the Christian character of their community as a result of the presence of a few people of other faiths, because that conclusion would be patently *illogical*.

Neutrality is intended to help assure tolerance, but neutrality is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of tolerance (or of enthusiastic welcome, for that matter). It's important, for instance, to realize that intolerance among Christian sects of different stripes has a very long history. Sectarianism in the United States, in particular, has been characterized as "rampant" by renowned historians.²¹ In view of these facts, we suspect that a large degree of religious tolerance—perhaps a kind of ecumenical non-denominationalism—pervades social and business life in Scott County, Tennessee, where so many churches of differing views already exist.

Both parents and high school students told us that Oneida was a close-knit community. Adults and students alike claimed that the adults watched out for each others' children. Each group realized the possible liabilities of such scrutiny, though the students were perhaps the most conscious of the liabilities. The parents believed that the community's watchful eye substantially outweighed the liabilities.

It seemed to us that the OSSD operated a high school that would be *acceptable* to the outside world, while it simultaneously cultivated one that implemented the traditional commitments of the locality. We doubt that either the superintendent or the community would be disposed to take dramatic steps toward remaking the town or the county merely for it to become maximally *attractive* (not just "acceptable") to the outside world. They seemed to imagine a process of incremental adjustment, not transformative or revolutionary change. Nearly everyone with whom we spoke felt the town and the county and their setting on the Cumberland Plateau possessed a particular and enduring character that they sought to preserve throughout the process of growth and change. They considered their home a place they loved and wanted to be in, despite its challenges and out-of-the-way location.

Life in the School

Oneida High School enrolled 340 students in the 1997-98 academic year, with about 85 students in each class. The teaching staff in 1995 (the most recent year for which these data are available) comprised 24 teachers (full-time equivalencies), and the student to teacher ratio was 15 to 1. In 1997, all but two students were White, a common demographic presentation in rural Appalachia. The National Center for Education Statistics classifies Oneida as a “small town.”²³ To qualify for this study, researchers agreed to include small-town schools only if they were not suburban schools. Oneida High School is clearly not a suburban school, but a school located in a small town serving a surrounding rural area. Knoxville, the nearest city, is about 90 minutes to two hours away.

As we did with the parents, we sponsored a focus group for about 15 high school students. Students came from all four grade levels and a variety of family backgrounds. A very slight majority expressed aspirations that would suggest they were college-prep students. Since most students proceed after graduation to a postsecondary setting, the group was probably somewhat representative of the school as a whole; though, of course, the focus group technique neither aims at nor requires such representativeness.

School size. Students in our focus group shared many opinions, but had to be continuously reminded that we were not seeking consensus but a variety of viewpoints from individuals. Many participants reiterated the view that the best thing about Oneida High School was its small size, which afforded an intimate and caring school climate. Two students who had attended larger schools contrasted their previous experiences with their more substantially positive experiences at Oneida.

At the same time, small size was perceived as a liability by most of these students, because they felt the outside world found it difficult to credit the accomplishments of the students and the school. According to one student, “They just don’t think we’re as good as they are.” Another student added, “The only time we ever get any publicity is when something bad happens around here.” This comment was in reference to the recent tragic death of a popular football coach. This remark startled us because we understood the local media to be attentive

and solicitous. The students, it turned out, were referring to attention in the *Knoxville* media.

The outside world. This interchange suggested to us that the outside world served the students to some extent as a kind of gauge of their importance or validity. The students did not articulate or probably understand this position and its complexity as well as parents did. This view of the outside world would seem to hold that although the most important reality and work are focused inside the community, the respect of the outside world for Oneida is not only desirable but *due*. Parents and high school students clearly believe that Oneida is “holding its own”—thriving in the face of evident challenges.

There is a tension in this perspective for young people, whose actual experience of an outside world is entirely theoretical. And yet the parents’ hopes that their children would find a vocation in the outside world that would help them return to Scott County and Oneida were clearly reflected in students’ longing to experience life beyond the Cumberland Plateau. Two students put it this way:

[Student 1] Because I love this school and I’ve been other places when I’ve had the chance to go . . . and I know how they are. I think a lot [of the expressed desire to leave Scott County] is curiosity; or maybe people just want to rebel. . . .

[Student 2] I think that’s what the general consensus is. Most of my friends, they want to get out and see what else is out there, because if you’ve lived in Scott County all your life, it’s unbelievable what goes on out in the real world, and most of them want to get out and see what’s going on and then they’ll appreciate [life in Oneida].

Students, unlike their parents, tend both to take the world that is in front of them *too* seriously (“this too shall pass” is not a youthful sentiment) and *not seriously enough*. “The real world,” as expressed by student 2, lies somewhere over the horizon. The adults with whom we spoke hold a more complex view, though for them, the local community figured perhaps as the most “real” world. And this was a view they clearly wanted to see the school cultivate in the children of the community. Another student elaborated on the preceding observations as follows:

Well, it's like if you do well in school here and like you go off to college, *people usually come back and get jobs here*. So it like makes our community better because we have better jobs and more opportunities and more educated people here. So it like all comes back to *you need to come back to this community and become a member of it* [emphases added].

What school is for. When we asked students what constituted a good school, we received opinions that were as definite as those that parents expressed about good teachers:

1. prepares you for life
2. not just academics, but extracurricular stuff
3. teaches you how to be a good citizen
4. a school that shows you that you can excel
5. a school that's willing to help you through life
6. a school that you don't have to worry something bad is going to happen
7. it's real community involved

The students, at least in this discussion, focused even more than the parents on the role of school as somehow suiting them for life. If academics are important, they are important mostly in an instrumental mode; that is, knowledge as a means and not an end in itself. This sequence of student remarks, however, may be inaccurately interpreted in isolation, since so much of students' time and effort actually is devoted to academic tasks and academic classes. Students' remarks proceeded associatively rather than linearly, and, in fact, it became clear from their associative remarks that they relied on teachers and coaches to nurture their academic performance.²⁴ From numerous reports, it seemed clear that academics constituted the core visible work of school, and that students, parents, and teachers regarded academic accomplishment as a higher priority than athletics or band. However, both academics and sports were seen as contributing to a larger purpose. That larger purpose might be understood as "the good life" (in classical terms), or "the glory of God" (in Christian terms), or "the community" (in contemporary secular terms). The complexity of these interlocking purposes seemed evident to practically all the adults with whom we

spoke; the students' appreciation was more tentative and tacit, but clearly developing.

The **principal**. The students were vocal in their appreciation and admiration of the high school principal, Coach Harper.²⁵ They clearly seemed to credit the principal for making Oneida a good school. One student, who was undecided about what to do after high school, opened this phase of the conversation this way:

The principal is really involved. He tries to get you into stuff that maybe you don't want to do but he wants you into for your own good.

Another student reported this anecdote:

One time we was coming down for a football game and we had . . . to put up a fence so people wouldn't try to sneak in. And he was down there doing it himself. He wasn't letting janitors do it . . . and then we got there [to help, we infer]. He worked so hard, it's unbelievable.

There was more praise about Coach Harper—how he spoke easily with all students, how he was not supercilious or remote, and how, when he meted out punishment, he also talked out the incident with the students involved. One student summed up,

He watches out for all of us. When something bad happens, he's always right there. He tries to make sure that all of us—I mean, he doesn't pick favorites . . . not with the popular kids or the smart kids or anything. *He's there for all of us* [emphasis added].

Really bad things. One of our probes, prompted by the remark just quoted, challenged the students to tell us what sort of bad things might happen to someone at Oneida High School. The responses, to our surprise, did *not* focus on events in the lives of students. We might have expected to hear about students getting in trouble or having the usual adolescent crises, but in this conversation, those themes did not appear. Instead, what the students spoke of were the deaths or other losses of people dear to them, both in the community and the school. This train of reflections may have been the result of an unusual year, but the diverse students in this group seemed to us remarkably concerned with others and remarkably unconcerned with themselves. Meeting inevitable and unavoidable threats together has often been cited as one of the

hallmarks of genuine community.²⁶ One student referenced that perception this way:

It's been one thing after another this year, and I think we're really a lot closer than we were. I mean it's sad to say that it took that, but everybody pulled together.

Work Lives of Teachers

Eight teachers (or 33 percent of the faculty) spoke to us in a focus group held at the end of the day in the school library. A few participants left and a few joined late, as their need to conduct after-school activities required.

When asked, about half the participants identified themselves as coming from families with educators, and perhaps a third readily affirmed that they came from “families of educators.” All the teachers but one in the focus group were natives of Scott County or the town of Oneida. The single exception was a teacher who grew up in the neighboring county. “We’re here by choice,” said one of the participants.²⁷

The teachers reiterated many of the themes raised by parents and students—the importance of community, leaving and returning, caring and nurturing. The teachers reported not only that they nurtured the students and one another, but that the students extended caring back to them. This remark was made in specific reference to the death of a popular and influential teacher, Coach May. According to one teacher, “There was a lot of pull together on both ends. They supported us as well as our supporting them through that time.”

Academics and sports. The teachers, as might be expected, claimed that academics were a priority in their work. They also, however, grasped the ambiguity of this assertion. The complexity of this appreciation comes through in the following remark from one participant:

I think here that with our teachers, teaching comes first and you should strive for excellence. It doesn't matter if it's the classroom or it's an athletic field, and I think that's a strong push and something to be proud of. That was something that always really bothered me to go to a meeting and in the past, I was in the social studies field and I moved last year into [something else], but you introduce yourself and you say, “Yes, I

teach American history and I coach football.” And it’s an automatic stereotype. And I don’t ever want to be ashamed that I coach and I influence a lot of young men and we’ve been very successful. You know, but there’s times that I didn’t say I coached just to see the response, and it was different. But I had as much pride in the classroom as I did on the practice field, the game on Friday night, and I think that’s a big thing with us.

In fact, the conversation made it clear that athletics and academics were bound closely together, with teachers and coaches actively working each role to enhance the other.

In a small school like Oneida, this common overlap of reinforcing roles is possible; in much larger schools it is far less common.²⁸ It struck us that the Oneida teachers and staff were working this system purposefully for the benefit of students and community. Inevitably this means that neither academics nor sports come first. One teacher who had taught elsewhere, where sports *were* (according to her) given priority, reports a different experience in Oneida:

I was having some trouble with some athletes and a coach was trying to sort of push me into helping them still remain eligible, but that coach was put in their place very quick and very—and got in quite a bit of serious trouble because of it. I saw that support for me and what I was trying to do with the academics and . . . when they come in and say, “Well, I had a game last night and I just didn’t have time,” I say, “Hey, your academics is what’s going to get you through life, not playing basketball.”

There is an ethos of concerted effort prevailing in the school, an ethos that perhaps reflects the enterprising character of the town. It was not surprising, therefore, to have the story begun in the preceding passage continue, practically in the same breath:

And since it’s a small school, a lot of our students end up playing every sport coming and going. You know, we don’t have enough to make up teams unless they participate. And so, you know [for] a lot of them, it’s an all-year-long thing. They go straight from one practice to another and some of them still hold down jobs.²⁹ They’re a lot harder working than a lot of students that I’ve been around, some of them.

Leadership. When we asked the teachers about the source of the leadership that sustained the school, the first response articulated was “I think we all have a leadership role. . . . I really think you could say . . . that each teacher expects their best.” They were not bashful about exercising responsibility or recognizing its effect.

At the same time, the teachers indicated that their leadership was enabled by the principal and the superintendent. For example, one teacher noted,

Our principal has a very open-door policy. I don't have to sit down and plot my plan before I go to him. . . . You understand, he is my superior, but yet he presents himself, I don't mean as an equal, but [you just] go to him with an open mind and he speaks to you with an open mind. I don't have to sit down and plot my plan before I go to him.

This remark seems to indicate that the teachers vest the same degree of trust and confidence in Coach Harper that the students do.

The superintendent was credited with setting the tone for the entire district, so that the district leadership was viewed as enabling a style consistent with the ethos of the school. When asked whether micro-management had ever been the style of the board or the superintendent, the answer was “no,” but the response was elaborated upon as follows:

I think it's great that if you do make a mistake that it's looked at as a learning opportunity rather than how many lashes can I give you for this. . . . They seem to be more supportive . . . you know, “Let's do it different next time; let's see how we can fix the problem.” And that's from the superintendent. I mean, he seems to set the tone a lot. If he were the type that were real high strung and really got all over people, then I'm sure it would filter down. And you know, our school board isn't that way. Our superintendent isn't that way. He would come up tomorrow and sit in my class if I asked him to. He would be there.

Difficulties. In some schools, busy or burned-out teachers cannot avoid conveying the impression that they are besieged by troubled students or parents, or that students somehow constitute “the opposition.” Such signs of difficulty were notably absent from this conversation, but the teachers did point up some challenges explicitly.

Remarks from the researchers about burnout led to mention of salaries. The teachers said that the school committee structure prevented burnout. The reason offered surprised us. The school is partially governed by faculty committees with “some power, so you feel like your efforts are worthwhile.” The committees meet after school, and with all that the teachers already do, the surprise for the visitors was that teachers would cite *extra duties* as a way to prevent burnout!

Oneida teachers agreed to forego collective bargaining (to which they are entitled under Tennessee law) in exchange for ongoing support by the aforementioned benefactor. Their reasoning reflects dedication to a mission that transcends salary: “One reason we backed off on that [was] because we felt we had most everything that we would have gotten through a contract anyway.” But salaries remain a concern, though evidently not a priority. As one teacher put it,

Yeah, if we could just get a little better salaries for the teachers—that’s the thing. Your teacher salaries are poorer here than they are in the county [the SCSD]. The teachers’ salaries are terrible here. I think we’re 96th in the state [out of about 150 districts].

Another circumstance that troubled teachers were the comparative merits of heterogeneous versus homogeneous grouping. Teachers seemed conflicted on the issue. Opinion was perhaps divided, but not so sharply, it seemed to us, as to constitute a controversy. How best to group students was an issue that seemed to *puzzle* the teachers. The school had added a number of advanced placement classes into which academically talented students selected themselves. But for the rest, students seemed not to be grouped by ability or even by achievement within particular courses. Thus, the school was not *tracked*, and very little homogeneous grouping was actually implemented. Clearly, some teachers were not sure that the present arrangement was optimal.

The puzzle for teachers is a long-standing one: how to best serve students who are attempting to learn the same thing but who arrive with widely differing preparations. This situation (that is, teaching students with a wide range of previous accomplishments) seems to leave many teachers feeling that they may not have given their best to all students. In the ethos of the school—that is, hard work combined with caring—this perception would be distressing.

In our conversation, there was no sense that closure on the issue might be imminent. In some ways, of course, this concern is the existential dilemma of teaching. Most people who teach or have taught would recognize this nagging feeling of inadequacy. How can one be *sure* one has done enough? The feeling can be neither dismissed nor answered with certainty. Ultimately good teachers want to do quite a bit more than just “enough.”

All of the teachers in the focus group expressed intense dissatisfaction with standardized testing, despite the fact that Oneida was doing quite well in statewide comparisons on such tests. One participant remarked,

I may be speaking for myself, but I know a lot of teachers are really fed up and tired of seeing so much standardized testing and I don't think standardized testing is fair to a lot of students. . . . I don't think you can have *one test that meets the needs of everybody in the country* [emphasis added].

Apparently, however, strong administrative support exists for continued testing, and the state of Tennessee itself has mandated yearly testing of all students for the Tennessee Value Added Assessment Program.

Teachers believed that their opinions about possible overuse of testing would carry little weight in the school, the district, or the state. This sense of powerlessness stands in sharp contrast to the teachers' general outlook, which otherwise seems distinctly powerful and secure.

Discussion

We visited Oneida High School in an attempt to develop a somewhat detailed impression of how and why the school might be said to flourish. We wanted to know how the school had been retained in the face of possible closure, and what influences sustained it to the point that it was said to “flourish.” A true ethnography would tell a much more detailed story, but the data gathered during our visit suggest some very strong possibilities that are consistent with the research and evaluation literature about such places. In addition, there are unique circumstances that account for the current success³⁰ of this particular school and district.

Retaining the school. The OSSD has a 75-year history as a unique institution for the community that sponsors it. It nonetheless exists

within a state system in which the norms would easily permit, and probably facilitate, its incorporation into the SCSD. This circumstance means that the community that sponsors the district, basically the town of Oneida,³¹ must maintain the school effectively amid this ever-present, if mostly tacit, pressure to combine with the county district. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, relations within the school community eroded to the point of precipitating fears that the district might be nearing the end of its existence. The potential loss of the district appears to have constituted the wake-up call that rallied the community. Both the grassroots and the elite reportedly contributed to the defense. Fund raising, including the successful application for a substantial grant from a small group of private benefactors, leveraged a facilities program and an educational improvement program. The town's elite network (that is, prominent business and political leaders and affluent benefactors) secured the commitment of a school district leader who was, it seemed to us, ideally suited to help the district go beyond mere maintenance of the district.

Sustaining the school. It seemed to us, as well, that a "large vision" sustains Oneida High School. Family, hard work, caring for others, and the sense that these values link generations may constitute the core meanings behind this sustenance.

The town of Oneida, being the center of enterprise in Scott County, also sustains its school with an influential view of academics as the route by which young people may discover, as one participant in the parent focus group phrased it, "their vocation." Increasingly the actual discovery, if one can so conclude from the data gathered, will take place in educational experiences beyond high school. It seemed to us that students were being helped at many turns to look inward at themselves, but also to look outward at their community for a source of meaning and purpose. And the local sense of "vocation" seemed to us to include the idea that students would return home where vocations would be most meaningfully practiced.

Now, no one articulated this view in exactly this way, and the people we talked with might be surprised to hear it phrased like this. But much of what we heard from adults and students suggests this interpretation. The "vocation" we heard described was not an abstract set of skills that might be used anywhere, nor did it seem to point to an abstract "professionalism" useful in Nashville, Memphis, or New York

(as a focus group participant put it). Instead, it seemed to entail an uncommon degree of devotion and higher purpose; that is, the duty to develop some skills and use them on native ground for the benefit of community and family.³²

This interpretation strikes us sharply, perhaps because we have been accustomed to rural school systems (in central Appalachia) that emphasize a very different construction of vocation; one that facilitates permanent outmigration, abstract professionalism, and personal advancement over the common good.³³ Our own experience enables us, perhaps, to recognize that something very different is happening at Oneida High School in Scott County, Tennessee.

The flourishing school. What sustains the school is ultimately what allows it to flourish under “decent” conditions. Oneida High School, we think, flourishes simply because it so obviously reflects the commitments that, in fact, sustain it.

Decency also implies economic factors. In the OSSD private funds have supplemented public schooling for the good of the community. In comparatively “poor” Oneida (where, according to the *School District Data Book*, the median household income was half the national average, the overall poverty rate more than twice the national average, and the per-pupil expenditure less than half the national average), the willingness of wealthy residents and prosperous businesses to fund the common good must surely be applauded.

Conclusion

The case of Oneida suggests that the all-too-common disconnection of schools and communities need not happen. It also suggests the nature of the work required to sustain local schools that are integral to their communities. The community, in sustaining the high school in Oneida, articulates a view of the outside world that reflects an intense respect for local perspectives. The result seems to be an institution that puts *local* purposes before global purposes. The result is not really a high school that could thrive anywhere in the country, but one that thrives where it is. Oneida High School offers an academic and social experience that most Americans would envy, while maintaining its particularity. That accomplishment is perhaps especially enviable. Being widely enviable *yet* particular may constitute an indication that the OSSD community is realizing its vision of sustainability at a high level. Oneida

is, perhaps, an exemplar of the “gemeinschaft community” in every sense of the word.³⁴

Notes

1. This case study was conducted by the regional educational laboratory at AEL, Inc., as part of the Laboratory Network Program funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
2. See, for example, A. DeYoung, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School: Farewell, Little Kanawha* (New York: Garland, 1995); and A. Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union: School Consolidation and Community Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
3. See, for example, C. Howley and H. Harmon, “K-12 Unit Schooling in Rural America: A First Description,” *The Rural Educator* 22(1): 10-18 (2000); and P. Theobald and C. Howley, “Public Purpose and the Preparation of Teachers for Rural Schools,” *The Teacher Educator* 33 (3): 150-64 (1998).
4. The town of Oneida lies astride U.S. Route 27 in north central Tennessee, approximately 7 miles south of the Kentucky border.
5. H. C. Smith, *Dusty Bits of the Forgotten Past: A History of Scott County* (Huntsville, TN: Scott County Historical Society, 1985), 504-05.
6. Segregation, of course, prevailed at that time, so a student had to be White to be “eligible.”
7. This observation, however, needs a good deal of explanation. People with whom we talked insisted that their less affluent neighbors would be offended to be called “poor” or “living in poverty.” And our conversations indicated that returnees, for instance, considered reduced incomes a very acceptable price to pay for the opportunity to live once again in Scott County.
8. Data sources describing the town of Oneida and the OSSD offer conflicting information because of the “special” status of the district. Accurate data describing *district residents* differ from data describing *residents of the town*. To complicate matters further, these data differ from data describing the circumstances of *families whose children actually attend* the OSSD, since 60 percent of OSSD students actually live outside the district boundaries—boundaries not coincident with the boundaries of the town!
9. Scott County’s rural town development conforms to a pattern identified by scholar of city life Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations: Principles of Economic Life* (New York: Random House, 1984). According to Jacobs, cities tend to specialize in government or trade, adhering to what Jacobs, in a later work *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics* (New York: Vintage, 1992), terms the guardian moral code or the trader moral code. At the state level, leadership is often divided between such cities: New York City and Albany; Minneapolis and St. Paul; Frankfort and Louisville (or Lexington). The guardian centers are typically restrained and conservative in style, whereas the trader cities are often flamboyant. This specialization seems, somewhat surprisingly, to be at work in rural Scott County. The more typical *rural* situation is that the county seat combines trading and governmental functions in one town. In Scott County, however, the more staid town of Huntsville is the governmental center, while the

busier, flashier Oneida is the clear center of trade. (These adjectives hardly do justice to the two towns but are used to give the reader a quick flavor of the differences.) The distinction may help explain the unique rural *entrepreneurial outlook* on education that seems to prevail in Oneida.

10. Smith, *Dusty Bits of the Forgotten Past*, 505.
11. See, for example, DeYoung's 1995 account of Gassaway and Burnsville, West Virginia, *The Life and Death of a Rural American High School*.
12. The OSSD gets funding from the county commission on a per-pupil basis. This money would otherwise flow to the SCSD. Prevailing values of efficiency and centralization tend to favor the absorption of independent districts by county districts that surround them. Against this tendency are arrayed the power and influence of the localities that sustain independence. In the case of the OSSD, one might guess that power and influence proceed not from wealth (Oneida is not an affluent place) but from its legacy of enterprise and civic action. The higher average educational attainment in the town probably reflects this legacy. In any case, a crisis of leadership that entailed financial difficulties would often constitute sufficient justification for an SEA to act to reorganize a district out of existence (see, for example, Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union*. In fact, the fire marshal *had* reportedly "threatened" to condemn the district's facilities [T. Harper, "Oneida, Tennessee Has Fixed Its Gravely Ill Schools for Good," *Sky* 118: 121-22 [May 2000]]. This threat is commonly made throughout rural America, but it is seldom carried out. The real threat is that inadequate facilities constitute a pressing reason to consolidate rural schools, all else equal.
13. See Appendix B for an update by Mayfield Brown on recent events in Oneida.
14. Factors that limit choice, of course, would probably include lack of transportation and distance from the town of Oneida. Investigation of the influence of such conditions is among the threads that more extensive research of the district would have pursued. It is possible that choice and transportation issues mean that the OSSD attracts more affluent students from the county. Subsidized meal rates for Tennessee school *districts* (i.e., not the high school only) in 1996-1997 showed the OSSD at about the 85th percentile of poverty (with 54 percent of students receiving subsidized meals), statewide, on this measure, whereas on the same measure, the SCSD ranked at about the 98th percentile (81 percent receiving subsidized meals). Subsidized meal rates, of course, are influenced by factors other than poverty, such as grade level of student, recruitment efforts that vary by district and school, and parents' willingness to apply for assistance. Both districts, it is still clear, serve populations substantially more impoverished than average in Tennessee. (Source: Tennessee Department of Education Web page, accessed October 2000: <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/arc/rptcrd97/freed.htm>).
15. Smith, *Dusty Bits of the Forgotten Past*.
16. See, for example, C. Howley, *Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size: A Short Story* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 401 089; K. Irmsher, *School Size* (ERIC Digest) (Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1997), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 414 615; and M. Raywid, *Current Literature on Small Schools* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1999), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 425 049.

17. Both W. Jackson in *Becoming Native to This Place* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994) and G. Logsdon in *The Contrary Farmer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 1993) argue for rural education that helps students become (to paraphrase the title of Jackson's book) "native to a place," that is, to making particular rural places *home*. Love of home, according to Logsdon, is a critical rural quality. Without it, he notes, small rural communities and occupations wither. Both writers, among many others, contrast this rural attachment to home-place with the placeless upward mobility on which, they claim, so much educational practice (including practice in some rural schools) rests.
18. The "life-world" is a concept invented by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas to indicate the realm of everyday life, a realm that is often unremarked and unexamined, but from which, according to Habermas, the deepest meanings of our lives arise. The concept has been popularized in the United States by a number of scholars, including, in the field of education, Thomas Sergiovanni. Both Habermas and Sergiovanni believe that the life-world was assaulted during the 20th century by forces (e.g., advertising) that eroded its ability to serve as a source of strength for communities and individuals. In other words, the decline of community (and common purpose generally) is partly attributable to a narrowed scope for the life-world.
19. See, for example, Annenberg Rural Challenge, *The Annenberg Rural Challenge* (Granby, CO: Author, 1995), ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 391 623; also see the Rural School and Community Trust Web site: <http://www.ruraledu.org>.
20. We saw *nothing* in the Oneida schools in violation of this principle. At the same time, however, both authors appreciate the fact that adults or children are bound to retain and cultivate their faith—whatever it may be—on both sides of the schoolhouse doors. This is true of both of us. Incidentally, one of the authors is a Christian and one is not.
21. See, for instance, 22 R. Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York, Knopf, 1963) and *Academic Freedom in the Age of the College* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1955).
22. We saw *nothing* in the Oneida schools in violation of this principle. At the same time, however, both authors appreciate the fact that adults or children retain and cultivate their faith—whatever it may be—on both sides of the schoolhouse doors. Incidentally, one of the authors is a Christian and one is not.
23. All data are from the Common Core of Data (CCD) School Years 1993-94 through 1997-98, published by the National Center for Education Statistics (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2000).
24. One teacher told us that a visiting university professor had criticized high school staff for nurturing students. The teacher implicated that the visitor believed such nurture was somehow inappropriate. In what way or to what extent it was inappropriate was not clarified.
25. Teachers were called by their titles: Miss, Ms., Mrs. most commonly for the women and "coach" the usual title for the men. Women who coached were known as "coach" also. A few men did not coach and were called "Mr." With 24 faculty members, the teachers were every bit as busy with extracurricular activities as their students.

26. See, for example, D. Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).
27. That is, for this teacher and probably many of his colleagues, the commitment to make Scott County home is an active, thought-out choice, and not the path of least resistance, as it might appear to outsiders.
28. See, for example, D. Meier, "Can the Odds Be Changed?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 79(5): 358-62 (1998).
29. We asked students in the focus group how many held jobs. About half indicated they did.
30. At the 85th percentile of poverty (subsidized meal rates) in the state, OSSD students as a group typically score in the range of 65th-75th percentile on nationally normed tests of achievement. One should also note that the SCSO, at the 98th percentile of poverty on this measure, exhibits test scores that hover around the mean of national norms. Means on college entrance tests (the ACT is most frequently taken by students) are nearly the same for the two districts (ACT composite score, 1996-1997). (Source: Tennessee Department of Education Web site, accessed October 2000, <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/arc/rptcrd97/index.html>).
31. In fact, the geographic boundary of the OSSD is not even coincident with the municipal boundaries. The boundary is most commonly described as the "watershed of Pine Creek," apparently the locale in which the strongest support for the creation of the district existed in 1915. People within this watershed vote and tax themselves for the maintenance of the district, but the district also secures about 25 percent of its funding from the county administration.
32. Local families, as noted previously, can trace their roots in the county back 200 years or more. Kinship networks are probably dense and strongly connected, though we were not able to investigate this likelihood. Again, this is an issue that would concern an ethnographic effort.
33. See, for instance, A. DeYoung and C. Howley, "The Political Economy of Rural School Consolidation," *Peabody Journal of Education* 67(4): 63-89 (1992); A. DeYoung, C. Howley, and P. Theobald, "Cultural Contradictions of Middle Schooling for Rural Community Survival," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 11(1): 24-35 (1995); H. Harmon, "Creating Work-Based Learning Opportunities for Students in Rural Schools," *High School Magazine* 6(6): 22-27 (1999); Howley, *Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size*; C. Howley, H. Harmon, and G. Leopold, "Rural Scholars or Bright Rednecks? Aspirations for a Sense of Place among Rural Youth in Appalachia," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 12(3): 150-60 (1996); and K. Seal and H. Harmon, "Realities of Rural School Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan* 77(2): 119-25 (1995).
34. F. Lutz and C. Merz, *The Politics of School/Community Relations* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992). The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, in *Community and Society*, translated by C. Loomis (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957), first distinguished between "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" groups at the end of the nineteenth century. People in *gemeinschaft* groups have been said to cohere despite their differences, whereas in *gesellschaft* groups, people remain separate despite their commonalities. *Gemeinschaft* literally means "community" or "commonality," whereas *gesellschaft* denotes "corporation," "association," or "society."



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