



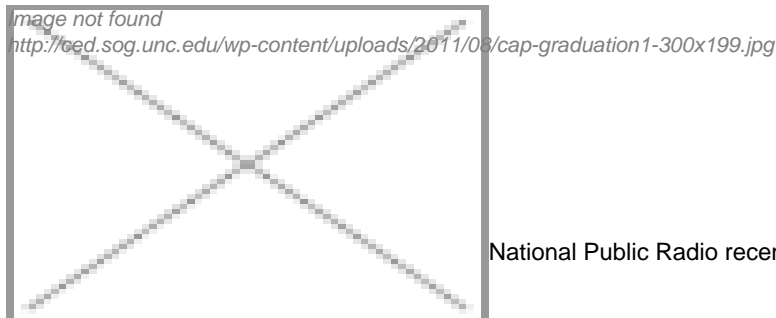
Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: The High Costs of Rural High School Dropouts

By CED Guest Author

Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/the-high-costs-of-rural-high-school-dropouts/>

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National Public Radio recently featured a series of reports on the high cost of

high school dropout. Only one of the six reports focused on students in rural communities. The lack of focus on the needs of rural schools and youth is not unexpected. In 2003, the Brookings Institution issued a report stating that rural schools were "America's forgotten educational institution." A 2010 report by the Rural School and Community Trust, stated that the lower rates of educational attainment of rural students, when compared with their metropolitan peers, is an "invisible achievement gap."

The Community-Campus Partnership has initiated a new project in Caswell County, North Carolina to increase high school graduation rates. During the 2009-10 school year, there were 37 dropout events reported to North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction. Although the Caswell County School District has reduced dropout events by half since 2005, the loss of nearly 40 students within one academic year is significant for a small, rural community with finite state and federal subsidies to assist these youth. The community impact of dropping out of high school is well documented. Young people who leave school without a diploma are at greater risk for poor mental and physical health, incarceration, poverty, early parenthood, and low life expectancy.

In collaboration with Caswell County Schools and Caswell County Partnership Foundation for Children, Dr. Judith Meece and Ms. Martinette Horner, UNC-CH School of Education, will direct a project to gather information on the reasons students withdraw from high school. The project will involve conducting focus groups and interviews with 10-15 students who are no longer attending high school. The school district has provided a list of 39 students for interviews. The students range in age from 16 to 21 years. A nearly equal number of female and male students had withdrawn from high school during the 2010-11 school year, and half had left school before completing the tenth grade. The interviews will take place in August and will focus on the reasons students left school, the types of supports needed to prevent them from leaving, and the types of programs needed to help students re-enroll and earn a diploma.

As part of initiative, the UNC-CH partners also will conduct a review of research on effective programs for increasing high school graduation rates in rural schools that have similar demographic characteristics. The initiative will result in a set of recommendations the school district can implement to prevent the loss of students prior to high school graduation and to increase students' re-enrollment and successful high school completion. Like many rural school districts in North Carolina and elsewhere, the Caswell County School District lacks a dropout prevention program. Implementing such a program has the potential to improve the livability and viability of the local community.