



The Review
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An Introduction to this Issue of *The Review of Regional Studies*

Schools at all levels – be they elementary, secondary, or college – play vital roles in shaping the economic and social vitality of most communities. Those engaged in regional sciences and allied fields of work generally accept the view that the stock of human capital, coupled with the level of investment made to strengthen such capital, are important predictors in shaping the well-being of many localities. Several readers of this journal are very familiar with a host of cross-national studies of education and economic expansion, or with the sizable empirical research that addresses links between human capital attributes and regional wage determinants. However, the five articles presented in this issue of the *Review* tend to depart from these more familiar approaches to the human capital/economic growth connection. They do so in at least two ways. First, they focus largely on exploring the education and economic development association at the community and/or regional levels. And second, they pay special attention to how these relationships play out within the context of rural areas.

The articles included in this current issue of *Review* have their genesis in a 2003 national workshop on rural schools and economic development sponsored by the USDA's Economic Research Service, the Southern Rural Development Center, and the Rural School and Community Trust. The goal of that conference was to assemble in a single site a multi-disciplinary group of people engaged in applied research, practice, and policy analysis that would discuss and debate the state of rural education and its connections to local economic growth and community well-being. Four overarching themes served as the focal point for the research papers commissioned for this gathering: (1) Achievement in Rural Schools; (2) Rural Schools, Communities, and At-Risk Populations; (3) Schools and Local Community Impacts; and (4) Education and the Labor Markets in Rural Communities.

The majority of articles captured in this *Journal* issue are drawn from the fourth thematic area of that national workshop. Moreover, they reflect the perspectives of

agricultural and regional economists, as well as rural sociologists. These various lenses offer a richer foundation for better understanding the relationship between education/schooling and the economy, and why it may differ from place to place – particularly between rural and urban settings.

The first two articles, by Henry and Barkley, and Goetz and Rupasingha, examine the relationship between local education levels and measures of economic performance such as earnings and employment growth. Both articles note that places with better-educated populations generate more positive economic outcomes for their localities. The nature of the association, however, is weaker in rural (nonmetro) counties than in urban (metro) counties. The article by Israel and Beaulieu, coupled with that by McGranahan, approach the education/economic performance link from a decidedly different slant. In particular, they focus on the ways by which economic conditions, as well as human and social capital features, affect the educational prospects of local youth. McGranahan shows that areas heavily dependent on basic industries, especially manufacturing and mining, tend to suppress high school graduation rates, but that this tendency is weakening over time. Israel and Beaulieu's analysis confirms that the economic context seems to matter less in spurring educational progress and success than does the nature and strength of various social capital features present in families, schools, and communities. Finally, Mykerezi and Mills examine educational institutions as development engines by demonstrating the value of historically black universities and colleges to their surrounding regions – both in terms of educational levels and earnings.

Robert M. Gibbs

Lionel J. Beaulieu