

9-1-2014

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### Recommended Citation

Freeman, E. (2014). Placing the Standards. *The Rural Educator*, 36(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v36i1.572>

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# Placing the Standards: Will the Common Core State Standards Encourage Rural Youth Outmigration?

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*Rural areas in many parts of the U.S. experience population decline from outmigration. Geographic mobility has long been a contributing factor to the social and economic instability of rural communities; high-achieving and ambitious youth are inclined to leave rural areas to take advantage of the expansive economic opportunities and cultural and lifestyle amenities typically found in metropolitan locations. In this article, I review 20 years of research on rural population loss and migration theory to anticipate how patterns of rural youth mobility might intersect with the Common Core State Standards' emphasis on preparing high-school students to be career and college ready. Given that the migration decisions of rural youth stem from a complex process that includes a range of social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors, I argue that certain types of rural communities are likely to be more strongly affected by the Common Core as are certain types of rural youth.*

**Keywords:** outmigration, population loss, brain drain, Common Core State Standards, policy

For a significant number of rural communities in the U.S., population loss is endemic and the outmigration of youth accepted as an unalterable fact of life. Residents of these nonmetropolitan regions have typically spent this century and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century making the most of an unfavorable situation in which a norm of widespread outmigration persuaded discontented rural residents to take advantage of the more extensive employment and amenity opportunities available in metropolitan areas (Artz & Yu, 2011; Chen & Rosenthal, 2008; Johnson, 2006). Demographic data confirm what these communities have experienced first-hand: rates of outmigration from nonmetropolitan areas are significantly higher than for metropolitan areas and the flight of college-educated youth is arguably the most economically and socially acute population loss of all (Artz, 2003; Hektner, 1995; Theodori & Theodori, 2014). With population redistribution in the U.S. driven by a century-long ascendancy of urban and suburban milieus (Lichter & Brown, 2011), sparsely populated locations in the U.S. often struggle to keep pace in the competition to achieve broad-based economic growth and maintain a diverse and talented citizenry. Changing population densities and the social, economic, and outdoor opportunities associated with these contexts are partly revealed in census numbers (McGranahan, Wojan, & Lambert, 2011). In 1900, 46 million people or about 60% of Americans were spread across small towns, farms, and the open countryside (U.S. Census Bureau, 1993). Today, 46 million people live in nonmetropolitan counties, just 15% of the U.S. population (Kusmin, 2013).

Demographic ebbs and flows characterized by variability across time and place constitute a rural

paradox and a precarious balancing act (Johnson, 2012; Johnson et al., 2005; Krannich, Luloff, & Field, 2011; Lichter & Brown, 2011; Nelson, 2001; von Reichert, Cromartie, & Arthun, 2013). Spatial differentiation across rural landscapes means that some locations contend with a steadily shrinking and graying population while other rural locations enjoy widespread enrichment from a dependable influx of migrants, some of whom are young and well-educated (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Johnson, 2012; McGranahan, Cromartie, & Wojan, 2010; Winkler, Cheng, & Golding, 2011). Although recent rates of population loss have fluctuated, it is apparent by now that the long-term counterurbanization trend predicted decades ago has not materialized as anticipated (Frey, 1987; Fuguitt, Brown, & Beale, 1989). No imminent population surge is about to pour in and buffer rural areas from the prolonged impact caused by youth outmigration. In fact, the situation has worsened in recent years because the absence of a rural renaissance has converged with recession-induced rural outmigration to exacerbate the usual outflow from rural areas (Cromartie, 2013).

The upshot of these outmigration trends is that of the 1,976 counties recently reclassified by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget as nonmetropolitan, 1,269 of them lost population during 2010-2013, a record high (Cromartie, 2014). In over 700 of these counties, population loss exceeded 10% (McGranahan, Cromartie, and Wojan, 2010). Losses were most prominent in the Great Plains region stretching from Montana to Texas; the Corn Belt areas of Iowa, Illinois, and other Midwestern states; the Mississippi Delta; the northern Appalachians; and the rusting industrial and played-out mining belts of Pennsylvania and New

York. Gains were largest in the high-amenity regions of the Pacific Coast, Intermountain West, Ozarks, southern Appalachians, along the Gulf of Mexico, the southern Atlantic coast, and in rural counties adjacent to metro areas (Johnson, 2012; McGranahan, Cromartie, & Wojan, 2010).

Given the inclinations of ambitious youth for geographic and social mobility, the migration patterns of rural youth pose a challenge to the regeneration of core rural values and experiences such as self-sufficiency, strong connections to family and community, resiliency, and industriousness. Shifting spatial dynamics threaten to diminish the social, economic, and environmental well-being of communities across much of rural and small-town America (Flora & Flora, 2008; Kusmin, 2013; Stauber, 2001). In places where the fabric of a durable rural community life is already stretched thin, the risk that unchecked youth mobility may cause additional stress in the years ahead cannot be dismissed. The law of diminishing returns means that in rural communities withering away from a shrinking population base, attempts to devise comprehensive and sustainable approaches to rural prosperity frequently fail to take root.

The lives of rural residents are notable for their greater likelihood of being marked by lower incomes, higher poverty rates, declining health outcomes, and lower educational attainment than their metropolitan counterparts (Battelle for Kids, 2014). As a result, rural parents and educators along with civic and business leaders appreciate the urgency of preparing their young people to be college, work, and future ready. But for rural donor communities grudgingly reconciled to the departure of their best and brightest, the frustration of being trapped between a rock and a hard place is prosaically familiar. The dilemma of being unwilling to withhold educational opportunities rife with potential to transform and empower young lives insistently weighs against the untenable costs to community viability exacted by the provision of such an education (Domina, 2006; Flora & Flora, 2008; Miller, 1993). The graying of rural America makes attracting younger people and new wealth more urgent at the same time as a history of boom and bust makes civic and economic security less than certain (Winkler, Cheng, & Golding, 2011). The transformation of America from an agrarian to an urban society all but guaranteed that the economic, cultural, and political hegemony of the nation's metropolitan regions would become manifest in the day-to-day experiences of rural people and the everyday conditions found in rural communities (Lichter & Brown, 2011).

In this paper, I respond to the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards

([CCSS], 2014) by relating the standards to rural population loss and the outmigration of youth. Lichter and Brown (2011) are not the first researchers to observe that “rural areas and small towns often remain misunderstood and are too frequently ignored, overlooked, or reduced to stereotypes in the public and scholarly discourse” (p. 566). While the recent debate surrounding the standards has surfaced a number of important issues, the educational and political feuding has failed to consider the implications of the standards for rural communities, especially the potential of the CCSS to encourage the outmigration of youth. To correct for this omission, I argue that in the 42 states still committed to the Common Core, it is useful to examine the contemporary drivers of youth outmigration since population decline has a deleterious impact on the economic, social, and environmental well-being of rural communities. When young adults leave a rural community, the stock of economic, social, human, cultural and political capital is diminished (Flora & Flora, 2008; Feser & Sweeney, 1999). An understanding of whether the CCSS are likely to become an additional driver of rural youth outmigration can provide local leaders with important insights into how educational policies can alter ambient levels of community capital (Ulrich-Schad, Henly, & Safford, 2013).

I ground my analysis in 20 years of research on rural population loss and migration theory to anticipate how patterns of rural youth mobility might intersect with the CCSS' emphasis on preparing high school students to be career and college ready. Because the United States has no experience with *national* curriculum standards and little understanding of how national standards explicitly affect rural populations, this study is a tentative inquiry into the dynamics of this relationship. In the sections that follow, I trace the policy origins of the CCSS back to 1983 and the flawed but influential report, *A Nation at Risk*. From there I review the economic rationale underpinning the standards and how a supply-side theme of human capital development has been insinuated into the standards under the rubric of college and career readiness. I go on to examine what motivates young people to leave rural communities and weigh the implications of their decisions against the needs of rural America to stanch the outflow of these often irreplaceable assets. I conclude by extrapolating from the empirical literature on youth outmigration which young adults are likely to be immune to the economic message inscribed in the Common Core and who are most susceptible.

## Origins of the Common Core State Standards

Knowledge of the Common Core's origins allows for insights into both the creators of the standards and the intentions of the policy. Although the final version of the CCSS was released to the public in 2010, the impetus behind the Common Core is traceable to *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the persuasive report whose tone and content is credited with propelling American education toward the preparation of a workforce capable of achieving and competing at high levels in the emerging global economy (Greenwood, 2009; Manna, 2006). The historical tendency for both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan schooling to be conscripted into satisfying national economic and political ends more than educational ones was manifest in the language used in the report (Kliebard, 2009; Labaree, 2010; Spring, 1998). One of the more dire risks thought to be facing American society in the 1980s was its need for greater human capital. In accord with this belief, the architects of *A Nation at Risk* were unabashed about yoking schools to an ideology of social efficiency, a mechanism that has as its principal aim the preparation of children for future adult roles, especially occupational ones (Kliebard, 2004; Kosar, 2005; Manna, 2006). Schools were assigned an instrumental responsibility in mitigating the risk:

We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete for them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America's position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer. (National Commission On Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 8)

On the purportedly leveled playing field of the interconnected global economy, complacency was a conceit the U.S. could no longer afford. In this new economic regime, competitor nations had equal opportunity and historical and geographical divisions were dissolving into irrelevancy (Friedman, 2005). In setting the tone for educational policy for the next 30 years, *A Nation at Risk* announced unequivocally that the era of America's narcissism as an unrivaled economic powerhouse was over. In 1989, President George H.W. Bush gave the curriculum standards movement a shot in the arm when he convened an education summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. He used the occasion of this well-publicized meeting to persuade the nation's governors to take the lead on standards-based reform. The governors, acting under the auspices of the National Governors Association

(NGA), agreed to establish national goals or standards and pledged support for the development of state initiated reforms, to be augmented with limited federal assistance (Shanahan, 2013).

Five years later, Goals 2000 (1994) further advanced the standards agenda. When this legislation was signed into law by President (NCLB), Congress elected to follow a different tack than the system of voluntary compliance relied on by previous legislative initiatives. In a significant departure from past practice, states were compelled to create and adopt content standards and assessments. This approach was formalized through mandated annual testing in grades 3-8 and legislation that attached punitive measures to schools that failed to meet annual benchmarks (Klugh & Borman, 2006). Because No Child Left Behind mandated annual testing in the time-honored curriculum areas of English, Math, Science, and Social Studies, traditional subject-matter was tacitly reinforced as the measure of intellectual development. In this way, No Child Left Behind buttressed the social efficiency paradigm inscribed in public policy since *A Nation at Risk*.

When Race to the Top (RTTP) was announced by the U.S. Department of Education (2009), it was touted as President Obama's signature contribution to innovative educational reform. An initiative designed to improve teacher quality, use classroom data effectively, and devise strategies to help struggling schools, RTTP included a strong focus on raising standards and aligning policies and structures to promote college and career readiness. Launched in the aftermath of the Great Recession, which lasted from December 2007 to June 2009, RTTP scrambled to gain traction in an economic recovery too weak to create the jobs needed to keep pace with normal population growth or put back to work the millions of workers idled as a result of the collapse (Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz, 2012). Passage of the American Recovery and Restoration Act (2009) legally authorized RTTP to supplant the beleaguered remnants of NCLB and soon thereafter, the Obama administration began to insist that states applying for federal funds make their willingness and readiness to adopt common standards a priority. In RTTP applications, 70 points out of a possible 450 were awarded to states indicating adoption of or transition to "a common set of high-quality standards" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 7) along with common assessments.

An optional requirement in name only, the inclusion of standards in RTTP illustrates how little U.S. educational policy rhetoric has changed since the first generation of standards-based reform in the 1980s. A burgeoning consensus then and a solid

consensus now posit that America's public schools are failing students and the nation. Following in the footsteps of both *A Nation at Risk* and NCLB, RTTP appeals to America's presumed waning global economic status as the *raison d'être* necessitating reform:

Maintaining the status quo in our schools is unacceptable. . . America needs urgently to reduce its high dropout rates and elevate the quality of K-12 schooling—not just to propel the economic recovery but also because students need stronger skills to compete with students in India and China. (Duncan, 2009, p. 1)

A paradigm of social-efficiency inspired policies is unlikely to be displaced any time soon so long as American policy makers can profitably use education-in-crisis as a political talking-point. In fact, the system has only gained strength in recent years, employing a narrowly-focused, college-preparatory curriculum reliant on standardized assessments to gauge student and school progress (Manna, 2006). The globalization themes that have dominated curriculum and assessment policy since *A Nation at Risk* continue to shape educational decisions today. This orientation is readily discernable in the economic rationale underpinning the Common Core State Standards.

### **Debut of the Standards**

Released to the public in June 2010, the CCSS initiative has been spearheaded by the National Governors Association (NGA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), Achieve, and the Gates Foundation, organizations whose skillful maneuvering around the usual state policymaking apparatus has proved instrumental to the rapid development and promotion of the standards (Rothman, 2011). As the principal architects of the standards, the CCSSO and the NGA had previously presented the Obama administration with the major policy blueprint, *Benchmarking for Success* (Jerald, 2008), which explained how individual states could work around their differences to collectively endorse a set of internationally benchmarked standards that aligned textbooks, curricula, and assessments with the standards. Asserting that American education had not adequately responded to the new challenges brought on by globalization and the rise of knowledge-based economies, *Benchmarking for Success* mimicked its alarmist predecessor, *A Nation at Risk*, by warning “The United States is falling behind other countries in the resource that matters most in the new global economy: human capital” (p. 5). *Benchmarking for Success* underscored how American workers of today no longer compete only

with skilled workers domestically but also with workers living in Russia, Eastern Europe, China, India, and other developing countries. The report surmised that “Since the U.S. can no longer compete in *quantity* of human capital, it will have to compete in *quality* by providing its young people with the highest level of math, science, reading, and problem-solving skills in the world” (p. 11).

As an ambitious regulatory endeavor intended to bring the patchwork of unruly state systems into much needed alignment, the CCSS revives the Goals 2000 campaign for national standards and assessments that faltered in the 1990s during the Clinton years. Compared to the presumably less rigorous learning standards they seek to replace, the CCSS have been promulgated as a strategy capable of transforming the United States into a global leader in education. Developed to align with college and employer expectations aimed at making U.S. students more competitive in the modern global economy (Business Roundtable, 2013), the standards promise to equip high school graduates from metropolitan and rural districts alike with a world-class education. Unlike previous approaches to educational reforms, emerging economic realities make state-to-state comparisons less important than how students in the U.S. measure up against students around the globe whose educational qualifications are now on a par with graduates of American schools.

### **College and Career Readiness**

Both the CCSSO and the NGA maintain that equity and the economic primacy of the U.S. underlie the current iteration of the standards (Mathis, 2012; Rothman, 2011). Both organizations argue that national standards are imperative if the nation is to remain globally competitive and students are to graduate college and career ready (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012). Survey research indicates strong and bi-partisan support for the idea of college and career readiness (Achieve, 2010); Mathis (2012) describes this mantra as the “linchpin” (p. 5) rationale for establishing a national set of uniform standards. The policy literature on Achieve's website contends the college and career readiness rubric serves as the unifying agenda binding the P-20 education enterprise together, “the umbrella under which many education and workforce policies, programs and initiatives thrive” (Achieve, 2014, p. 1). At the policy level, the agenda spans K-12 and postsecondary education as well as the business community. At the program level where the standards are actually put into practice, the agenda is a partnership between educators, students, parents, community members, business leaders, and anyone

else with a stake in ensuring that American students are prepared to compete globally (The Future Ready Project, 2013). In spelling out the skills and content students are expected to master at each grade level across district and state lines, the standards are meant to steer students toward any number of pathways leading to college and career readiness previously shut off from them (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014).

Specifically, college ready means “a high school graduate has the English and mathematics knowledge and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college coursework without the need for remedial coursework” (The Future Ready Project, 2014, p. 1). Similarly, career ready implies

a high school graduate has the English and math knowledge and skills needed to qualify for and succeed in the postsecondary job training and/or education necessary for their chosen career (i.e., technical/vocational program, community college, apprenticeship or significant on-the-job training). (The Future Ready Project, 2014, p. 1)

The ultimate goal of college and career readiness is twofold: to fuel American prosperity and to equip students with sufficient flexibility to successfully navigate a progression of job and career changes across their lifespans, a skill seen as increasingly essential for mobile 21<sup>st</sup> century workers.

Several corollaries associated with the Common Core’s emphasis on college and career readiness round out proponents’ arguments for why the venture must succeed. One corollary asserts that jobs of the future offering family-sustaining wages, security, and broader opportunities for workforce advancement will increasingly require postsecondary education or training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Holzer & Lerman, 2009). A second corollary maintains that occupations employing large shares of workers with post-secondary education and training are growing faster than those with lower education requirements (Executive Office of the President, Council of Economic Advisors, 2009). A third corollary claims there is a serious skills mismatch in the U.S. between the number of middle-skill jobs and the number of workers available to fill these positions. Like population loss and youth outmigration, the ratio varies geographically but overall there are too few middle-skill workers and much of the mismatch is attributed to a lack of aligned education options (Biroonak & Kaleba, 2010; Gibbs, 1998).

Regardless of the college or career path a student ends up following, education or training beyond high school is slated to become the new common denominator while the ultimate measure of college and career readiness is access to the middle-class jobs

that are the conduit into a middle-class life style. This scenario is problematic on several counts for rural communities and the outmigration of youth. For starters, the language of reform utilized by the CCSS reinforces uncritical acceptance of a market imperative that promotes social efficiency—enriching the nation’s supply of human capital—as a foundational purpose of contemporary schooling. However, the relationship between educational attainment and economic growth is less firmly established than commonly assumed (Goldin & Katz, 2008). The widespread acceptance of contemporary schooling as an investment in the nation’s supply of human capital belies the fact that it is difficult to confirm a direct link between the effect of education on workforce productivity and its role as a stimulus for economic development (DeYoung, 1989; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004; Labaree, 2010; Marsh, 2011; McNamee & Miller, 2009; Wolf, 2003). Empirical support for this supposition is sufficiently inconclusive to warrant further investigation before enacting it into policy. Nonetheless, the Common Core admits to no uncertainty about advancing its capacity to reinvigorate America’s languishing economy. The Common Core is similarly unapologetic about imbuing formal education with a level of significance about which some scholars express serious doubt.

If the CCSS are indeed overly invested in the idea of an educational meritocracy in which those who work hard to obtain a good education are invariably able to get ahead in life, then the standards pose a kind of double jeopardy for rural communities already drained by youth outmigration. This is because the economic vision of schooling embraced by the CCSS goes one step further by repositioning education as a private good instead of a public good. If the CCSS gains traction in rural classrooms, the thrust of education will undergo a concomitant shift from a rationale of social efficiency to one of social mobility. With social mobility as the focus, the primary beneficiary of public education will shift from society to the individual diploma holder. Education as a vehicle for instilling civic virtue and building community cohesion may become secondary to its value as a mechanism for facilitating access to a lucrative job and an advantageous social position (Brown, 2003; Labaree, 2010).

As it pertains to social mobility, the consumerist ethos of the Common Core is eminently compatible with the conceptual underpinnings of neoclassical economics and human capital theory. According to neoclassical economic logic, outmigration occurs because of spatial discrepancies between the supply and demand of labor in sending and receiving communities (Gibbs, 2005; Loveridge, Yi, &

Bokemeier, 2009). What this means in practice is if the net value of living is deemed to be greater elsewhere, individuals will weigh the economic merits of packing their bags to pursue the greater value (Borjas, 1987; Sjaastad, 1962). To make optimal use of individual talent within the nation's geographically dispersed opportunity structure, talent holders assess in what location their personal stock of knowledge and skill is most marketable (Becker, 1993).

The migration model inspired by this deployment of talent reduces departure from rural places to a prudent appraisal of opportunity costs. Monetary and prestige incentives have long enticed individuals with greater endowments of education and talent to fill society's most lucrative positions and rural communities know from experience how the economic specializations beckoning from outlying metropolitan regions loosen young people's attachments to place. Under the CCSS, there is a chance the intensity of these emotional attachments may be further diluted. In the absence of emotional ties, leaving one's community becomes more of a practical exercise in upward social mobility based on projected economic returns to educational investments, investments that serve as a passport to success somewhere in the metropolitan mainstream (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Storper & Scott, 2009). Exit becomes a rational event as opposed to a cultural event, shaped by the entrepreneurial anticipation of securing higher income and more enviable social status (Burnell, 2003; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007). The CCSS are morally neutral in this regard, maintaining a strict agnosticism as to whether critical tasks and individuals cluster in rural or metropolitan locations. The Common Core's perspective on college and career readiness is national in scope, not local.

Rural communities can take comfort in knowing that migration behavior is steadily being recognized as more complicated than each individual dispassionately engaging in a cost-benefit analysis of relative job opportunities (Loveridge, Yi, & Bokemeier, 2009). Nevertheless, human capital discourse has successfully drowned out these nuanced understandings and now dominates post-industrialism's placeless approach to rural and metropolitan development (Bell, 1976; DeYoung, 1989; Stockdale, 2006). Post-secondary education and life-long learning are education's most popular refrain these days but the rationale of economic utility at the ideological center of the CCSS misapprehends the function of schooling in rural contexts. When education is untethered from place, it becomes more susceptible to political winds offering up the marketplace as the natural framework

within which human interactions are best performed (Harvey, 2005; Turner, 2008). The ubiquity of neoliberal discourse and the migration behavior it spawns are the antithesis of policies aimed at making rural communities more resilient and adaptable and survival less difficult (Redlin, Aguiar, Langelett, & Warmann, 2010). The benefits associated with the acquisition of human capital are known to flow disproportionately to metropolitan destinations where the economic infrastructure is dense enough to accommodate it. Brain drain from rural places consistently translates into brain gain for metropolitan locations. If the Common Core hastens the outflow of knowledge and skills, rural communities could wind up in a downward spiral of steadily diminishing returns where existing economic opportunities continue to erode and outmigration is stimulated even further (Domina, 2006).

### **Patterns of Rural Youth Outmigration**

A prominent feature of geographic mobility is age and educational selectivity. Of all age groups, rural outmigration is most highly concentrated among young adults in the 20-29 year-old age bracket (Carr, Lichter, & Kefalas, 2012; McGranahan, Cromartie, & Wojan, 2010) who possess or are in the process of acquiring the kinds of commodified post-secondary education and skills (Hoxby, 2009) targeted by the Common Core's college and career readiness framework. Mobility is a basic motif in how young people comprehend their transition into adulthood and rises sharply with departure from home and community to pursue higher education, join the military, get married, embark on a career, start a family, buy a first home, or other personal reasons (Brown & Schafft, 2011). "Leaving the nest" or "striking out on one's own" after high school is a time-honored rite of passage marking the beginning of independence from the previous generation (Plane & Jurjevich, 2009). As a sociocultural resource utilized by youth to forge adult identities and pathways, mobility carries a range of meanings and even young people living within the same community engage with mobility in different ways (Thomson & Taylor, 2005). Young people from middle-class backgrounds have a more pronounced tendency toward geographic mobility than those from working-class backgrounds (Stephens & Townsend, 2013) and in rural sociocultural contexts this tendency may confer higher status or merit on young folk who engage with it. Migration decisions and destinations also shift in ways that parallel changes in underlying life-course transitions. A young person's choice of destination reflects fundamentally different motivations and preferences than the determinants

that dominate later life stages (Whisler, Waldorf, Mulligan, & Plane, 2008).

The post-industrial landscape of the U.S. has thrust rural communities into a period of transition known as rural restructuring that is introducing significant changes into traditional land use patterns, economic activities, and social arrangements and institutions (Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Nelson, 2001; Smith & Tickamyer, 2011). The breadth of this transformation makes anticipating the effect of the Common Core on the mobility of rural youth dependent on comprehending the multiplicity of factors that influence the decisions of young adults to remain in or migrate away from a rural community. Observed against a post-industrial backdrop of vanishing social and economic regularities, the susceptibility of rural youth to appeals for college and career readiness will vary from person to person, school to school, and community to community. Whereas some youth will eagerly welcome the call, others will be decidedly less hospitable to the exhortation to use education as a springboard to advancement.

The reconstitution of rural places calls out for narratives and perceptions that capture what rural life is really like. An image of a rural utopia filled with noble, tough, and hard-working people living more virtuous lives than the rest of us is no more informative than a view of the countryside as a rural dystopia saddled with marginal services and facilities, a dearth of good-paying jobs, and stifling levels of social homogeneity and cultural isolation due in no small part to the inherent nature of rural inhabitants (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007; Lichter & Brown, 2011; Macgregor, 2010; Wood, 2008). Both discourses are defamations. Rural youth derive meaning from the intersection of diverse community attributes and have at their disposal a range of human, social, and economic resources to draw from; their migration decisions are no less complex than those of metropolitan youth (Salamon, 2003). Because the migration patterns of rural youth typically reflect a range of monetary and nonmonetary factors present in both the sending and receiving communities (Ulrich-Schad, Henly, & Safford, 2013), the Common Core can be expected to demonstrate a less than uniform effect, to the despair of its designers who seek to harmonize school outcomes across disparate locations.

A demand-side perspective on rural youth outmigration contends that a lack of jobs in rural areas prompts many young people to leave in search of better economic opportunities, often in metropolitan settings (Fuguitt, Brown, & Beale, 1989; Fuguitt, Heaton, & Lichter, 1988; Petrin,

Schafft, & Meece, 2014; Wilson, 1987). This spatial division of labor argument has been around for years and contends that expanding and upgrading the job structure in nonmetropolitan areas is more critical to slowing youth outmigration than investing in human capital (Killian & Beaulieu, 1995). Spatial mismatch theory runs counter to the human capital approach taken by the CCSS. However, a supply-side corollary of this perspective consistent with the ideology of the Common Core finds college-educated workers in nonmetropolitan areas searching through the same vacancies in the job pool as workers possessing a high school diploma (Lichter, McLaughlin, & Cornwell, 1995). The most desirable jobs end up being monopolized by the highest ranked workers. In a job-queue theory of labor markets, workers must improve their stock of human capital if they hope to successfully compete for jobs (Thurow, 1975).

Migration decisions are also influenced by a desire to take advantage of goods and services whose supply is unequally distributed across geographic markets (Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2013; Molloy, Smith, & Wozniak, 2011). Sociologists and economists categorize desirable goods and services as amenities and one way of conceptualizing youth mobility is as a spatial phenomenon conditional on the availability of valued amenities. People move to certain locales because of scenic and other amenities and in exchange for access to particular amenities, are occasionally willing to work for lower wages than what they would accept in less desirable locations with fewer amenities to offer (Power, 1996). A consumerist model of rural outmigration examines the drawing power of metropolitan locations whose array of resources may include more attractive climates, scenery, social or cultural assets, schools, parks, housing, lifestyle alternatives, or family and friendship connections. Thus, locations rich in youth-oriented consumption amenities are likely to experience a rise in youth immigration. A young person may choose to stay in a rural community for similar reasons, even though income maximization may be higher elsewhere (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2007), but in general, amenity-poor locations are likely to experience higher rates of youth outmigration (Greenwood, 1997).

One contemporary example of how demand for amenities is refining our understanding of youth migration and rural economic growth is Florida's (2002) notion of the creative class. According to Florida, occupations involving high levels of creativity are the cornerstone of today's knowledge economy. The creative class is both largely urban and highly mobile, drawn to places that fuse interesting lives with interesting work. Its members

are employed across a wide variety of industries ranging from technology to high-end manufacturing, journalism to finance, entertainment to the arts. People engaged in these occupations seek rewarding work and a quality of life associated with dynamic environments and amenity-rich places. Its well-educated members are united by an ethos of difference and individuality that gives rise to new social and economic geographies that do not conform to outmoded paradigms like East Coast versus West Coast, Sunbelt versus Frostbelt, or urban versus rural. Instead, creative-class identities more closely mirror the class divisions that increasingly separate Americans by income and geographic location (Florida, 2005). This aggressive re-sorting is leading to concentrations of creative-class people in certain regions and towns and the concomitant bypassing of others. Rural communities may want to pay attention to Florida's starkly bifurcated schema because places that successfully attract and retain creative class people are predicted to prosper while places lacking in holding power are destined to fail. If Florida's theory is even partly correct in explaining the motivation behind rural outmigration, then the economic focus of the Common Core suggests it will find traction among prospective footloose creative-class types magnetized by the bright lights of the city. Individuals choosing to make a go of it in rural communities may feel no comparable attraction. The urban-centric focus of creative-class theory is prone to treat rural communities as backwaters estranged from the progressive influences of modern life with assets weighed down by political economies slow to shed the culture and attitudes of a bygone organizational era.

Theories assessing the comparative absence or abundance of social and cultural amenities are complemented by theories factoring in the influence of place-specific environmental characteristics such as natural amenities and proximity to outdoor recreational opportunities. Since the migration of people to different locations is associated with contrasting valuation systems of natural amenities relative to other factors, it is helpful to imagine the spatial effects of natural amenities on youth migration and population distribution as being spread out along a rural-urban continuum (Chi & Marcouiller, 2013). So, for instance, youth who migrate to metropolitan areas are likely to value employment opportunities and urban lifestyle amenities over other factors because these types of amenities are generally more plentiful in urban locales (Fallah, Partridge, & Olfert, 2011). Migrants to suburban areas fall somewhere in the middle and are likely to value natural amenities more than urban dwellers but less than rural residents (Partridge,

Rickman, Ali, & Olfert, 2008). Migrants to rural areas are likely to place a higher value on natural amenities or a sense of rurality than either urban or suburban migrants (Abrams, Gosnell, Gill, & Klepeis, 2012; Woods, 2010).

Migration models suggest that natural amenities such as mountains, lakes, forests, and rivers attract people and impel them to become permanent residents, a process that may subsequently lead to economic growth (McGranahan, 2008; McGranahan, Wojan, & Lambert, 2011; Vias & Carruthers, 2005). Although no theory of migration has yet been able to definitively resolve the question of whether jobs attract people or people attract jobs (Stockdale, 2006), as an attractor of talent associated with the creative class, natural amenities constitute an integral part of the mix. The preferred topographic profile appears to be a variegated blend of milder winters and cooler summers, forest cover interspersed with open pasture and rangeland punctuated by small amounts of cropland, and easy access to lakes, ponds, rivers, or the ocean (McGranahan, Cromartie, & Wojan, 2010). Low-poverty immigration counties are consistent with these characteristics. In contrast, low-poverty outmigration counties correlate with low scenic qualities, extensive acreage under cultivation, and limited public land. Outmigration in high-poverty counties is driven by low levels of schooling and difficult socioeconomic conditions rather than by geography. These data suggest the exodus of young adults will be more challenging for smaller, more remote, and farm-dependent rural communities with fewer natural amenities and outdoor recreational opportunities (Henderson & Akers, 2009).

McGranahan, Wojan, and Lambert (2011) propose a synergistic relationship they term the "rural growth trifecta" (p. 535). According to this explanation, areas high in natural amenities attract comparatively high proportions of youthful creative class types who in turn exhibit a greater inclination toward entrepreneurship than low-amenity places where industry plays a stronger role in shaping growth trajectories. Although this contingency model of migration has its advantages, the theory is somewhat static because it takes no account of how climate change influences migration flows. Climate change is already with us and near-term projections suggest it will continue to alter the current distribution of natural amenities. Climate change may make the Great Plains and North Central parts of the U.S. less desirable places to stay in or move to while the Intermountain region and Pacific Northwest may become more desirable. Parts of the Southern Appalachians, Ozark Mountains, and New England may also rise in popularity as the climate steadily warms. Lower-elevation sections of the Southeast

and Southwest that are already uncomfortably humid, dry, or hot may become more so, a gradual process that will depreciate the amenity value once held by these locations (Cordell, Heboyan, Santos, & Bergstrom, 2011).

### Conclusions

The dynamics of population loss and youth outmigration discussed in this article were set in motion years ago, a long time before the centralized economic framework for the CCSS was finalized in 2010 and presented to the states to adopt. The migration patterns entwined in the fabric of rural community life depicted here are part of larger economic, social, cultural, educational, environmental, and political mechanisms actively “pushing, pulling, rejecting, and holding back would-be migrants” (Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2013, p. 55). Given the confluence of factors that enter into a decision to remain in community or migrate out, there is no reliable way to discern which motivational force will act strongest on rural youth. Rural communities face two immediate issues in regard to the CCSS. The first is how mobility aspirations will continue to develop alongside attachments to community given the added presence of the standards. The second is whether the emphasis on college and career readiness will intensify the mobility intentions of rural youth. At this time, with full implementation of the standards barely underway, my response is decidedly mixed.

It is unrealistic and misguided to ask rural communities to replicate the milieu of economic, sociocultural, and educational activities that define metropolitan life. Rural youth firmly committed to outmigration as a means of furthering their education, gaining experience in the urban job market, or developing their innovative capabilities can be expected to pass through the education system largely untouched by the Common Core. Impatient to chase economic success in the larger world, these young people don't need new curriculum standards to incentivize them. They most likely already embrace the mobility ethic of the standards and have probably received ample encouragement over the years from well-meaning teachers and community members who have expressed keen interest in their futures. Similarly, rural youth eager to sample a broader range of cultural amenities will take the standards in stride and pursue their dreams of getting out largely oblivious of the Common Core's influence. The lure of distant natural amenities and outdoor recreational opportunities can be a potent stimulus for these young people, especially if it acts in concert with strong occupational and cultural migration incentives

(McGranahan, Wojan, & Lambert, 2011). For all intents and purposes, these rural youth believe their destinies will be fulfilled only if they leave. Their minds are made up and almost nothing will deter them from following through on their plans. These young migrants correspond to the leavers and seekers described by Corbett (2007) and Carr and Kefalas (2009). Because their mobility dispositions are already hardened, they are not the principal group being targeted by the CCSS.

The other end of the continuum is anchored by rural youth who reject or resist the individualistic mobility narrative rampant in modern society (Corbett, 2010; Giddens, 1990; Seal & Harmon, 1995; Theobald, 1997). These young people remain in rural communities for reasons that oftentimes reflect a rational assessment of their own needs and abilities measured against the economic, social, and environmental conditions available locally. Among the maNew York factors influencing them to stay may be alienation by the class structure and over-intellectualization of formal education that elevates mental over physical labor and the manipulation of ideas rather than things (Budge, 2006; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Crawford, 2009; Looker & Naylor, 2009); finding the rewards of an immediate paycheck more meaningful than the deferred returns promised by higher education; enjoyment of the natural amenities and recreational opportunities close at hand; inability to envision a place for themselves in crowded metropolitan environments perceived as hectic or impersonal; or membership in dense relational networks of family, friends, community whose shared values, attitudes and histories transmit a sense of belonging and agency over the myriad forces acting on their lives (Bauch, 2001; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Hektner, 1995; Lichter & Brown, 2011; Ulrich-Schad, Henly, & Safford, 2013; von Reichert, 2006).

Earning a high income is not the main priority of these rural youth despite feeling increasingly squeezed by a knowledge economy that has replaced a once vibrant manufacturing sector with service-sector jobs that come with stagnating wages and decreasing benefits. Educational upgrading might help raise wages although there is a justifiable fear of ending up with an educated workforce that is “all dressed up with nowhere to go” (Smith & Tickamyer, 2011, p. 6). Relative to metropolitan locales, there is weaker demand for knowledge workers in rural places. The lower educational level of workers in rural areas may be a marker of social-class solidarity or repudiation of a labor market where jobs requiring college education or advanced skills are simply less abundant (Burnell, 2003). It isn't that these youth are immune to education's charms but rather, within the

rural context of their lives, they are not convinced additional education represents a sound investment value. The supply-side argument of the CCSS is unlikely to gain much traction among these young people because the demand-side of the job equation isn't there to convince them otherwise. But unlike leavers, they also have compelling non-pecuniary reasons for hanging on and riding out the cycles of boom and bust that have long characterized rural areas. The marginalized economic status of these young adults should make them a prime demographic for the CCSS but their historic antagonism to the education gospel may be too much to overcome, except on a small scale. These young people correspond to the stayers described by Corbett (2007) and Carr and Kefalas (2009) and are too class and place bound to be a main target of the CCSS.

The CCSS may wield its greatest influence over a third group of young adults who can be thought of as straddlers or undecideds. These young people have characteristics in common with the two groups already mentioned. What distinguishes them from other young people is their ambivalence about the relative merits of staying or migrating out, over prioritizing the familiar and sinking their roots deeper into the place that nurtured them since childhood or pulling up stakes to discover if a cosmopolitan life delivers on its promise of greater prosperity and satisfaction. With respect to Corbett's (2007) or Carr and Kefalas' (2009) typologies, this is an ill-defined group who occupy a nebulous middle ground that comes with no a priori loyalties to either leaving or staying. It is conceivable that at some point in the future a number of straddlers may morph into returners but for now they are agnostics, betwixt and between, struggling to reconcile their aspirations for social mobility on the one hand and their preferences for rural community on the other. Hektner (1995) has shown how the contemporary drivers of outmigration create aspirational dilemmas for rural young people by pulling them in conflicting directions along any of several different axes. Rural adolescents weighing their educational, occupational, and residential options are likely to believe that living close to family and leaving their communities are both important dimensions of their lives (Lichter & Brown, 2011; Macgregor, 2010).

For rural communities anxious for insights into what the Common Core will mean for their students and schools, straddlers may be the young adults who prove most receptive to the Common Core's hegemonic theme of college and career readiness. The human capital model of migration and placelessness endorsed by the CCSS starts with the premise that national and individual prosperity is measured in higher earnings. By privileging young

people whose concept of utility maximization tilts ever so slightly toward metropolitan labor-market or amenity-based migration, the Common Core may serve as a tipping point (Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2013). If schooling indeed serves as an institution of disembedding as both Giddens (1990) and Corbett (2007) contend, and if the schooling experiences of rural youth and their decisions to migrate are positively correlated, then the mobility capital promised by the CCSS may be too much for straddlers--teetering on the cusp of indecision--to ignore.

A nationally coherent educational campaign pressing the residual value of college and career readiness may well prove successful if it can sufficiently overwhelm and render inaudible the emotional and kinship connections to social and physical space found within rural community contexts (Thomson & Taylor, 2005). By making college and career readiness seem like the only sensible choice, the reigning logic of mobility that has long characterized rural to urban migration in the U.S. remains in force. Whereas metropolitan youth can usually attend college and find gainful employment within reasonable proximity of home, the picture for rural youth is more complicated because these young adults often have to estrange themselves from community for a chance to develop their talents. While these separations may only be temporary, permanent displacement is the more typical pattern for rural youth who begin a new life elsewhere (Burnell, 2003; Hektner, 1995; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Stockdale, 2004).

Mathis (2012) has observed that the nation's cumulative experience with educational standards and assessments suggests the far-reaching effects of the Common Core will depend more on how states, school districts, and individual schools employ them than on the structure of the standards themselves. There is a grain of truth to this as it applies to metropolitan locations but for rural communities, the economic foundation of the CCSS may have significant consequences. Standards-inflected outmigration by itself would be less worrisome if rural communities weren't already disproportionately invested in the young people most likely to leave (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Corbett, 2009; Sherman & Sage, 2011). Contemporary patterns of youth outmigration would also be less worrisome if the Common Core were not poised to reinforce the sorting function of schools vis a vis a curriculum that equips select students with the best possible start in life while offering something less to non-college bound students. This makes the CCSS something to ride herd on, now and in the months and years ahead.

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