

# The Challenge of Rural Education: An Exploration of Rural Nonprofit Charter Schools

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate what nonprofit charter schools are doing to combat the challenges of rural education in areas such as transportation, teacher retention, student achievement, and resource management. The research also qualitatively assesses the successes and failures of nonprofit charter schools in addressing these problems.

Currently, there is limited research on the strategies and effectiveness of nonprofit charter schools in rural areas. There is, however, significant research detailing the challenges of rural education as well as the successes and failures on nonprofit charter schools on a generic level. Johnson and Strange (2007) deliberate on the unique challenges rural schools face such as limited school resources, geographic isolation, and limited community resources. In addition, rural schools often have difficulty offering an intensive curriculum including advance placement courses and vocational courses due to lack of finances and human capital constraints (Irvin Hannum Banks and Farmer, 2009). The research provided in this paper aims to build off of the research previously conducted about rural education and charter schools in general while adding value to the specific research niche of nonprofit charter schools addressing rural education.

A methodological approach to this research involved conducting phone interviews with multiple rural nonprofit charter school executives. The participants selected were based off of recommendations by other nonprofit charter school professionals. The interview questions were generated using *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as a guide. From a total of four interviews, two were recorded and fully transcribed, followed by an analysis of the data using grounded theory. The data went through three processes of analysis: first level coding, second level coding, and objective thematic categorization. After the first two interviews received first and second level codes, the other two interviews were conducted and analyzed using the second level codes of the first two interviews. If any pertinent information from the last two interviews did not match any of the pre-established second level codes, a new code was added. After all four interviews had been analyzed for second level codes, all second level codes were then analyzed to create five major categories where “no new properties emerge” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 192).



Through analyzing this study, there were several noticeable conclusions to be drawn about how rural nonprofit charter schools address rural education and some key factors that help determine their impact. Power of autonomy, measuring effectiveness, community involvement, transportation, and prioritization of teachers were five major components in how rural nonprofit charter schools address the challenges of rural education. The study found that there is significant power in rural nonprofit charter schools having autonomy. Three of the participants stated their schools’ ability to better serve rural students comes from their capability to adapt quickly to students’ needs, while the other participant referenced their capability to customize their learning programs in order to meet each student’s specific needs. The study found that all participants shared the same belief, that the power of autonomy in rural nonprofit charter schools to decide academic teaching style, curriculum, and individualized learning significantly impacts the growth and development of rural education students. As it pertains to measuring effectiveness, the study found that each participant perceives the “impact” of their rural nonprofit charter schools in a unique and personalized way. While this could potentially be beneficial as new criteria could be created in evaluating the “success” of some rural nonprofit charter schools, this can also be problematic in terms of comparative analysis of different rural schools as well as lacking uniform measurement standards. The study also found that community involvement varies greatly among different rural nonprofit charter schools. While all schools said they would like community involvement, not all receive the kind of support they desire.



As it relates to transportation, the study found that transportation is extremely costly to all rural nonprofit charter schools that participated in the research. For some schools, transportation was an essential need to the impact of the school, so budgets were prioritized based on transportation costs. Other participants, on the other hand, could not afford the cost of transportation which left the school's student population limited to those families who can carpool or transport

their children to school. Lastly, the study found that rural nonprofit charter schools approach prioritizing their teachers differently, but that retaining and hiring quality teaching applicants was a significant factor into the success and longevity of the schools.

As it pertains to the contribution of this work to the field on rural nonprofit charter school research, this study is extremely impactful because of the limited research currently in the field. This study can be a foundation and a spark for more expanded research to be conducted in this field. Addressing the challenges of rural education is important, and this study seeks to be a good start to further evaluate nonprofit charter schools by showing that these types of schools can provide a quality solution for aiding rural communities across the United States by increasing their educational attainment levels and academic growth.

If you would like to read the research study in its entirety, please email RJ Watters (RWatters@BBandTCM.com) and a copy will be sent to you. The final study will be published on Google Scholar in the coming weeks and on the BB&T Charter School Group page for access at any time.

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## Bibliographic References

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