

Implementing Full-Service Community Schools in a Rural Setting: Early Lessons from Leslie County, Kentucky

By Ryan Herman and Lynne Sacks

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Introduction

A typical school day for students in Leslie County, Kentucky looks different than the traditional experience in most rural regions. As first period begins, staff member Kammy Ostrander of WB Muncy Elementary is coordinating a discussion with a philosophy professor at the University of Pikeville as she finalizes details for an upcoming college visit. In the district's only high school, Caylene Begley is running an introductory session with an incoming cohort of ninth graders on the tools found in their "Freshman Readiness Kits." A few miles away, Nikki Lewis of Mountain View Elementary is consulting with external behavioral health experts on how to best support a student experiencing mental health challenges. From career exploration to school transitions to mental health, students in Leslie County Schools are actively engaged in a diverse range of tailored support systems that most rural schools lack the capacity for.

One may ask: who are these educators and how are they offering such a diverse range of personalized student supports when schools across the country are notoriously under-funded and short-staffed?



Administrators in the Leslie County School District, including Superintendent Brett Wilson and Assistant Superintendent Daniel Day, discuss strategies implemented during the pandemic with Drea Gentry and Melissa Newman from Partners for Rural Impact.

Begley, Lewis, and Ostrander are three of the five site coordinators who have been working in Leslie County Schools since 2020, when the district was awarded a [Full-Service Community Schools Program](#) (FSCS) grant, a program of the US Department of Education focused on improving the integration of social and health services into high-poverty school districts. By 2018, the FSCS model had been implemented in an estimated 5,000 schools across the country.¹ Despite 20 percent of all US public school students residing in rural areas, only an estimated eight percent of FSCS grants have been awarded to

rural communities.* In an effort to combat this discrepancy, the FSCS grant now prioritizes districts that qualify for the Small Rural School Achievement or the Rural and Low-Income School programs. To capitalize on this opportunity, [Partners for Rural Impact](#) (PRI), an educational organization in Eastern Kentucky supporting rural local education agencies in achieving high-quality and equitable learning outcomes for all students, has set out to support rural districts in applying for and implementing FSCS grants.

To date, there has been little documentation of how the community schools model is implemented and managed in rural areas. The EdRedesign Lab (EdRedesign) is an actionable research hub based at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education that partners with local communities to create integrated systems of support and opportunity for children. EdRedesign sought to better understand *how* the FSCS model is designed, implemented, and monitored in rural settings. In partnership with PRI, EdRedesign interviewed a number of stakeholders in the Leslie County School district to better understand how the district has implemented the model and what the district has learned from their initial years of FSCS programming. Interviewees included the program’s administrator, three school principals, three site coordinators, one FSCS director, one district administrator, and five community partners. This case study seeks to answer how rural school districts can best leverage the FSCS grant opportunity to foster effective partnerships between local organizations and schools to build a robust, holistic support system for students.

Overview of Full-Service Community Schools

Established in 2010, the FSCS Program is a competitive grant program of the US Department of Education. The program helps to build the capacity of schools to “work collaboratively with students’ families and leverage community-based resources to provide a tailored set of coordinated services and programs to a school community... that meet student social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs through after school and summer learning and enrichment opportunities, as well as mental and physical health services.” A 2020 study of Community Schools in New York City conducted by the Rand Corporation found that, under certain conditions, community schools are associated with improved attendance, on-time grade progression, credit accumulation, increased student sense of connectedness, and fewer disciplinary incidents.² The Biden-Harris administration proposed a \$413 million increase for the grant in 2022, raising “the capacity of the program to serve up to 2.5 million students, families, and community members in an estimated 800 new community schools.”³

The Learning Policy Institute conducted a comprehensive review of community schools in 2017 and identified four common features, which they term the Four Pillars of Community Schools:

1. Integrated student supports
2. Expanded learning time and opportunities

* The US Department of Education does not report its FSCS awards by region type, but EdRedesign staff were able to calculate the proportion of rural FSCS grant recipients using regional population estimates and proximity to urban centers.

3. Family and community engagement
4. Collaborative leadership and practice⁴

Leslie County and Leslie County Public Schools Context

Leslie County is a rural community of 11,000 people located in southeastern Kentucky. Home to a once-booming coal industry, Leslie County has experienced rising unemployment, increasing poverty rates, and a decreasing population since the industry's decline. Without a robust private sector in the county, the primary employers in Leslie County are the schools, courts, and healthcare system. Unemployment stands at 14 percent, double the national average. When PRI helped Leslie County Schools apply for a grant in 2020, 32 percent of the district's residents had less than a high school education, compared to 13 percent of the nation.^{5,6}



Leslie County High School in Hyden, Kentucky.

In 2020, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ranked Leslie County 107th of 120 counties in Kentucky in health outcomes, as measured by length and quality of life. Recently, drug-related overdoses in the county have risen 30 percent.⁷ In 2019, USA Today constructed an index consisting of poverty, the percentage of college-educated adults, and the average life expectancy at birth to determine the hardest US counties to live in. Leslie County came in eighth.⁸

Leslie County hosts 1,786 students across four elementary schools (grades K-8) and one high school. The confluence of the factors described above make creating equitable and effective learning environments difficult, especially when complicated by the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rural public schools are chronically underfunded and short-staffed, requiring teachers and administrators to wear many hats and making basic supplies such as calculators a rarity. With Leslie County Schools' declining enrollment, many resources, such as school-based social workers, are shared across the district's schools.

With the challenging road conditions of the Appalachian mountains, even ensuring student attendance can be difficult. Over a two-month period in early 2022, students only attended 10 days of school due to snow cancellations and COVID-19 outbreaks. Such conditions also make it difficult for schools to build relationships with students' families, who may lack their own transportation to attend school functions and meet with school staff as needed. These conditions

were exacerbated by the pandemic, when rural schools across the country struggled to transition to online learning due to poor broadband infrastructure. In Leslie County, only 65.8 percent of households had access to an internet broadband subscription prior to the onset of the pandemic.⁵

Despite these challenges, Leslie County Schools has managed to reach impressive levels of success during the pandemic. Although an estimated 80% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, the county reports metrics of success that exceed the state average. In the 2020-2021 school year, 79 percent of Leslie County's students were classified as Kindergarten-ready, compared to the state average of 53 percent. Leslie County children outperformed the state average in every metric of readiness (cognitive, language and communication, physical wellbeing, self-help, and social-emotional), according to the Kentucky Center for Statistics.[†] Additionally, whereas third grade reading proficiency scores dropped 23 percent on average across the state during the first year of the pandemic, Leslie County only saw a drop of six percent.⁹ Leslie County High School, which was classified as a turnaround school by the state in 2010, has rebounded significantly and currently outperforms the state average on various measures. According to the Kentucky Center for Statistics, in the 2019-20 school year, 80 percent of Leslie High School students were deemed 'College and / or Career Ready.' This value dropped to 66 percent for the state's high school population.¹⁰

“[D]espite the hardships some of our students have gone through,
they'll be the first ones to offer you the shirt off their backs.”
- Kendra Combs, Mountain Comprehensive Care

The success of Leslie County Schools is due to several factors, according to interviewees. One factor is the robust support from a decade-long partnership with PRI, which has helped bring external resources, such as Save the Children literacy programming, and other capacity-building efforts into the district. Another is the region's strong culture of community, pride, and resilience; Mountain Comprehensive Care's Kendra Combs described Leslie County as “an area of kind-heartedness and compassion... where we all help each other... and despite the hardships some of our students have gone through, they'll still be the first ones to offer you the shirt off their backs.” School leaders also attribute the county's recent success to the introduction of the FSCS programming and the benefits of increased, holistic student support, family engagement, and coalition building between schools and local partners.

Implementing Full-Service Community Schools in Leslie County

With support from PRI, Leslie County School Districts applied for and was awarded a FSCS grant from the US Department of Education, totaling \$2.5 million over five years, to begin in the 2020-

[†] Why care about Kindergarten Readiness? The Kentucky Center for Statistics has studied the correlation between kindergarten readiness and third grade math performance, specifically in Leslie County. Of the students who scored “Ready with Enrichments”, 35 percent achieved ‘distinguished’ scores in third grade math assessments, 27 percent higher than students who only scored “ready”.

2021 academic year. The district set out to leverage community partners to build a holistic support system that addressed student needs throughout their academic journey, from “cradle to career.” The district specifically set out with the goals of improving the following areas:

1. Kindergarten readiness
2. Academic preparedness
3. Socio-emotional learning and competencies
4. College and career readiness
5. Success in postsecondary learning

Robert Roark, who had previously served as principal of Leslie County High School, was hired as Project Director to oversee and direct the management of the FSCS program in Leslie. Roark proceeded to collaborate with school leadership to select and hire the five Site Coordinators, one per school, who would coordinate FSCS programming at the school level.

Getting Started: Launching FSCS in the Midst of a Pandemic

With the program launching in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Leslie FSCS staff were forced to mobilize quickly to respond to the growing range of needs that were limiting student learning in the county. Roark, in coordination with staff from RPI, began mapping out community partners around Leslie County and approaching them with the offer of collaboration. Luckily, this process was accelerated for Leslie County, who already had strong, previously established relationships with several service providers across the region through previous programming supported by PRI. Partners included behavioral health center Mountain Comprehensive Care (Mountain Comp), early childhood education network Eastern Streams Community Early Childhood Council (ESCECC), and members of the Hyden-Leslie Chamber of Commerce, among others. This new network of community service providers and school leadership, called the Advisory Council, began meeting quarterly to discuss how to approach student support in the district. Combs, a school-based mental health therapist from Mountain Comp, describes the typical Advisory Council meeting:



AmeriCorps volunteers Gary Douglas, Kolby Combs (LCHS senior) and Abby Howard- (LCHS senior) along with Volunteer Services Coordinator Melissa Napier (from left) shared how they provided support during the pandemic.

“The meetings tend to be 70 percent community partners, 30 percent staff from different schools in the district. I’ve seen the Department of Pupil Personnel, the assistant superintendent, guidance counselors, the Department of Health, and other stakeholders in attendance. Robert

leads the meeting, asking us to consider a certain set of questions: What makes our region special? What have we seen are the effects on the pandemic on students? What are our needs? What are the benefits of the grant so far?”

Combs’ description of her Advisory Council meeting experience echoes sentiments across the district on the importance of ensuring strong and regular communication channels between FSCS programming staff and school administration. For example, assistant superintendent Day sits on the advisory council, attends meetings regularly to represent district administration, and works in close partnership with Roark on the direction and evaluation of FSCS programming.

From its inception, the Advisory Council prioritized basic needs, especially food access, that were exacerbated by the pandemic. For the first eight months of the pandemic, Leslie County Schools partnered with Save the Children to distribute food box donations to families in need.

Internet connectivity also proved a substantial barrier to student learning and connection during the early months of the pandemic. With 34.2 percent of the households in Leslie County lacking consistent internet connectivity, prolonged school closures left many students without access to online learning. Roark’s response to such challenges was to lean on the county’s robust network of churches, a gathering point with far greater penetration in rural areas than most other institutions, and to collaborate with pastors to boost their building’s Wi-Fi signal so church parking lots could serve as accessible, free internet connectivity points for the community.



Leslie County High School in Hyden, Kentucky

As Roark and site coordinators began calling and visiting families during the pandemic to assess their needs, parents started increasingly citing student mental health and promoting healthy development with young children as concerns. In response, Leslie FSCS staff piloted Mental Health and Kindergarten Readiness take-home kits that enabled families to engage in and practice mental health and early childhood education activities at home with their children when normal school services were unavailable.

Developing Strong Partnerships and In-School Services

As schools slowly reopened, site coordinators were able to step in to further expand their roles. Aiming to identify and address individual student needs through an array of services, site coordinators across Leslie’s four schools took on a wide array of responsibilities: supporting

classroom teachers by co-teaching, coordinating collaborative events with community partners such as “STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) Nights” and nutritional classes, and supporting individual students through a variety of circumstances such as navigating the college financial aid process, scheduling how to catch up on homework after missing school, or arranging services with outside partners. Such supports have been cited as being incredibly helpful in reducing the overwhelming workload of teachers, allowing educators to return their focus to classroom instruction.

To be effective, FSCS staff need to have a strong pulse on the needs of their school community. Therefore, site coordinators are expected to be accessible and maintain communication channels with the student body, sometimes stationing themselves in school cafeterias, communicating with students over email, or allowing students to drop into their designated offices or classrooms. Site coordinators’ role entails spending the time that traditional instructors don’t tend to have to “get real specific” on what students’ circumstances are and how that affects their needs as learners. Site coordinators utilize ‘Check & Connect’ forms to monitor student progress, tracking student data regarding grades, attendance, behavior, and individual course performance, in addition to tracking any interventions school staff have taken to support the student, such as an additional tutoring session or home visit.

Collaboration between site coordinators and school staff is crucial. At WB Muncy Elementary, for instance, Site Coordinator Kammy Ostrander and Principal Brian Hubbard described interacting almost three to five times a day. Hubbard states “we have sat down many times and made list after list... detailing the goals of students and the goals we, as a school, have for them... and brainstorming how we can take these programs, these grants, and these partners to better benefit our students.” Site coordinators also communicate frequently with teachers, stepping into their classrooms as temporary aides or grabbing them after staff meetings, to identify individual students who may need additional academic and / or non-academic support.

“We have sat down many times and made list after list... brainstorming how we can take these programs, these grants, and these partners to better benefit our students.”

– Principal Brian Hubbard, WB Muncy Elementary School

The Leslie County FSCS team has been strategic in how they’ve used FSCS funding to strengthen community partnerships and students’ access to previously unavailable services and deeper learning within the school building. For example, an investment that has paid off immensely for the district has been the procurement of TI-89 calculators which have enabled every student above 7th grade to advance their mathematical learning both in-class and at-home. Heather Gay, Principal of Mountain View Elementary, described how virtual learning during the pandemic increased rates of math anxiety for older students, and a straightforward investment such as calculators for use at home, previously outside of the district’s financial capacity, reinvigorated students’ motivation and excitement to push their mathematical learning independently. FSCS

funding has also helped purchase class sets of seminal books for English classes, support some families to cover electricity bills and other essential costs during the pandemic, and fund training opportunities for site coordinators and community partners.

An array of advancements are occurring within Leslie County, resulting from the strengthened school-community partnerships that have formed during the FSCS grant period. Although this list is not meant to be exhaustive, here lies a representative sample of initiatives in Leslie County Schools that highlight the progress capable under FSCS:

Dual Credit Programming in Leslie County High School: With Roark’s support, Leslie County High school was able to work with local universities to raise financial assistance for students pursuing college level courses in their final years of high school. This drastically improves the ability for Leslie County high schoolers to graduate high school with an Associate’s Degree. In rural areas, where some of the highest achieving students are pressured to leave for postsecondary education, such opportunities help “show kids that they can do their jobs here, so they don’t feel like they have to move away from their home to find success”, as ascertained by Chamber of Commerce President Andrea Begley.

Ready Freddy: In her years supporting early childhood education in Kentucky, Emma Davidson, member of ESCECC and Child Healthcare Consultant with Kentucky River District Health Department, has seen large inequities in educational outcomes in Leslie County, where some families make the mistake of underestimating the importance of a child’s first years of learning. Davidson believes “there’s a need to reach all families early... with Kindergarten standards rising, coming in behind only exacerbates learning difficulties for families that lack strong bonds with their schools.” In response, Roark and Davidson have invested in piloting a robust, high-quality school-readiness program, [Ready Freddy](#), that will operate over the summer to prepare incoming kindergarten students for their transition into school. Leslie will be the second county in the region to launch Ready Freddy programming.

Farms to Schools Garden Project: With support from Site Coordinator Ostrander, WB Muncy Elementary was awarded a \$5,000 Farms to School Garden Grant, purposed with improving youth nutrition, gardening skills, and health habits. The school is now working alongside its students to design and maintain an indoor / outdoor hydroponic system to grow herbs, fruits, and vegetables. While students receive nutrition and cooking classes, they will also be working to sprout different plants that will form the foundation of their new garden ecosystem. The school plans to use products of the garden to enhance its current meal plan, supplementing traditional lunches with salads, juices, and other healthy alternatives.

Challenges to Implementing FSCS in Rural Settings

The implementation and management of FSCS programming in Leslie County has not come without its challenges. Family engagement is a key component of the community schools model,

but the pandemic has made interacting with caregivers an exceedingly difficult task. Principal Hubbard states, “with some families lacking internet connection, and some even lacking a phone line, if you don’t interact with parents during your school’s graduation or opening day, you may not see them for the rest of the academic year.” With COVID-19 safety restrictions prohibiting traditional forms of parent-school engagement activities, such as in-person events, staff at Leslie County Schools have had to rely on less common means to maintain regular communication with families. These have included conducting time-intensive home visits or phone calls to every family within the county, and relying heavily on social media, such as Facebook, to communicate with the community about upcoming events and services.

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– Principal Brian Hubbard, WB Muncy Elementary School

Leslie County’s geographic spread also limits the extent to which FSCS programming can be implemented. With many families lacking access to personal vehicles and living outside walking distance from their school premises, all FSCS programming must be fitted into school hours, or as mandated by school bus schedules. PRI Director of Programs Amon Couch tries to emphasize the need to maximize the 8am - 3pm time window when students will already be within school premises with the phrase: “make hay while the sun is shining.” This is a sacrifice that becomes increasingly difficult to justify during standardized testing periods. While some accommodations can be made by extending programming into after-school programming with adjusted busing schedules, other programs remain infeasible under Leslie County’s current transportation constraints, such as the high school internship program with the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board. Andrea Begley expressed such difficulties with supporting Leslie high-schoolers with the practical career experience they need, stating, “without dependable transportation in the county, many of our students won’t be able to take advantage of a job or internship opportunity after school hours.”

Despite these challenges, the initial years of FSCS programming in Leslie County have yielded some impressive preliminary successes. Across the county’s five schools, almost 900 unique services have been offered to students and families in the 2020-2021 academic year. For this academic year, the district is well on its way to tripling that number. Leslie continues to lead in early childhood learning outcomes, recently placing first in a sample of rural districts across Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia in Kindergarten MAPS scores in reading and math. Other metrics to demonstrate success are not yet available, partially because of the pandemic’s interruption of normal evaluation processes and the recent change in Kentucky’s student assessment tools. However, program staff continue to work with the data they have. As PRI Associate Director of Programs Jennie Pollard describes, they make time to sit down with school

staff and community partners to ask: “Did this or didn’t this work? How did this go last year? How can we change our implementation strategy to improve on these measures?”

Early Lessons from Leslie County

EdRedesign has identified the following building blocks that have contributed to the early success of the FSCS program in rural Leslie County. It is important to note that these foundational components have been built over 10 years of local capacity-building and coalition-building with support from PRI.

- 1. A School Culture That is Open to Change.** Since the rural context limits most FSCS programming to the school day, teachers and school leaders must be open to using some classroom instructional time for new types of programming and a more holistic approach to student support. Caylene Begley lauded the willingness of her school’s English Department to allocate some classroom instruction periods in the beginning of the school year so she could welcome the incoming ninth grade class and distribute and explain the newly-designed ‘Freshman Readiness Kits’, stating: “especially when some of our activities and services take up class periods, our schools need to have staff members who are going to be accepting of the new offerings the district has coming in.”
- 2. A Set of Locally-Experienced Educators Committed to Holistic Student Support.** In almost every interview, we heard the importance of ensuring that FSCS staff were local to the community. Kendra Combs of Mountain Comp emphasized that having local individuals at the head of these programs helps to build trust between schools, service providers, and community members in a culture of Appalachian pride which can, at times, make it difficult for families and students to accept help. Principal Gay believes that FSCS in Leslie County is uniquely successful because a lot of the staff are from the area, having grown up facing a number of the same challenges that their current students face, and therefore understand the value of such programming.
- 3. Finding and Supporting the Right People.** In recognizing the importance of people to the successful implementation of FSCS programming, it is also important to provide the structures to ensure the right people are brought into the system, and such people are then supported to thrive in their new roles. Hiring of FSCS staff should be a collaborative process with school leadership, prioritizing candidates with experience in education and familiarity with the area. Principal Hubbard spoke of the importance on ensuring that he found a site coordinator that had a similar vision of success for his students: “I found it essential that Kammy and I have the same vision for the kids, and although we don’t always agree on how we’re going to get to that vision, we agree 100 percent on the needs and the goals of our school.” Principal Gay expands on this to include the strategies she’s found success with in supporting the site coordinator in her school: “It is important to make site coordinators feel like a part of the team, not just taking on superficial extra positions. We must co-construct an assigned role for them to assume, and know what they’re doing every day before they enter the school building.”
- 4. A Network of Action-Focused Service Providers with Strong Value Alignment.** Nikki Lewis, Site Coordinator at Mountain View Elementary, explained the value of FSCS by

stating, “In rural areas, there’s less access to the diverse set of tools to solve student problems that urban areas tend to have... FSCS helps overcome barriers to diversify and increase access to a broader set of services that students can benefit from.” Therefore, having service providers with a strong commitment to student success is necessary to carry forward the mission of the community schools model. Roark describes the process of mapping out all the community partners he had access to on a mental matrix of *value alignment* and *action*. Rural districts also may develop different types of partnerships than urban ones. For instance, churches have proved essential to the growth of FSCS in Leslie County, acting as community hubs that can facilitate distribution of resources and outreach, helping to mitigate the challenges of the wider geographic spread of rural communities.

- 5. Strong Outreach Capacity and Relationship Building.** In some rural settings, transportation constraints and geographic spread means some families will be harder to reach. This complicates FSCS outreach into the community, leaving some families isolated from the offerings of the school and the services they or their children now have access to. Therefore, Leslie County FSCS has been extremely intentional in their outreach efforts, utilizing channels such as Facebook to ensure they are creating a story of what FSCS is and how families can take advantage of these new offerings. Principal Hubbard described his outreach strategy in an interview with EdRedesign, stating he was going to post Site Coordinator Ostrander at the front door at their upcoming Literacy Night, so she would be the first face to welcome families, introduce herself and her role, and start building relationships with caregivers.

“It is important to make site coordinators feel like a part of the team, not just taking on superficial extra positions. We must co-construct an assigned role for them to assume, and know what they’re doing every day before they enter the school building.”

– Principal Heather Gay, Mountain View Elementary School

Furthermore, the FSCS programming in Leslie County shows us that operating a community school is a *people-oriented* process that’s heavily reliant on collaboration across a range of stakeholders. Project Directors need to have strong relational and organizational skills, taking on the coordination of various services, programs, and relationships simultaneously in partnership with a number of different stakeholder groups. Site coordinators, on the other hand, need to be able to connect with both students and adults. Lewis states, “The biggest benefit I’ve seen come out of this grant is the ability for our schools to provide more one-on-one supports to our students. The grant has a student-centered approach, and recognizes that each student and family is different. Instead of grouping kids together and treating them all the same way, FSCS sees students as individuals, and helps us treat them as such.”

The FSCS grant envisions an integrated school-community network that is no easy feat to actualize. The initial years of the grant and the work it takes to pilot and coordinate a wide range

of partnerships, activities, and services can be daunting to staff as they enter these new roles. Through conversations with various stakeholders in Leslie County, the importance of robust organizational and continuous improvement tools, in addition to consistent communication between school leadership, site coordinators, and project directors, are needed to ensure FSCS programming can remain high-quality in as many areas as possible.

As Leslie County continues to expand, assess, and refine their community school programming, school staff and community partners alike are already preparing for the grant's completion in three years' time, when the school's funding sources will dramatically reduce. What does this preparation look like? It entails that the hard work of building strong relationships between schools and community organizations, and ensuring that newly established partners are invested in the long-term success of the community, is being prioritized now.

“Instead of grouping kids together and treating them all the same way, FSCS sees students as individuals, and helps us treat them as such.”

- Nikki Lewis, Site Coordinator

Roark has been pivotal in ensuring that the progress the FSCS grant is building now remains sustainable, prioritizing the investment in the human capital of the community, not just physical amenities and once-off packages that have definite end-dates. This strategic investment can be seen in how Leslie County now engages with families, helping build long-term skills such as financial management, and how the schools now support the professional development of their community partners. Combs of Mountain Comp told EdRedesign about her recent active bystander intervention training with Green Dot, an opportunity funded and offered by Leslie FSCS staff: “We are trying to invest in as many different people from as many different organizations from the community as possible. It's not just about throwing money around, but building our own rapport, collaboration, and foundation. We may lose access to the money in the coming years, but we will not lose what we have learned and what we have built together.”

Conclusion

The story of FSCS programming in Leslie County exemplifies not only the success of the community school approach in rural settings, but the success that can be achieved by bringing together similarly-driven actors to collaborate, innovate, and improve. Leslie County has made tremendous progress in its initial years of the FSCS grant, but has a long way to go in conquering the area's issues. Combs says “a lot of our problems are intergenerational - unemployment, isolation, a lack of basic necessities. We can all identify the problems, but it will take a long time to identify the changes that are necessary to overcome them.”

Indeed it may take long, especially considering Leslie County's decade-long head start, but the community school model demonstrates how such holistic, community-oriented work must be done: in partnership across sectors and with deliberate intention to put students at the core of

all decisions. In closing our conversation with Principal Hubbard, he shared with us his vision for the future of Leslie County, in which all students:

1. Have a reason to be excited and motivated to excel in school
2. Believe they are capable of more than their culture may have previously shown them
3. Align themselves with a future path that allows them to not forget where they come from
4. Recognize the value in and contribute to Leslie County in their adult lives

With the strong foundation Leslie is building under the FSCS grant, expanding how students are supported and who owns the safeguarding of education in the district, we're excited to follow the county's progress towards these goals in the coming years.

About the Education Redesign Lab

The Education Redesign Lab (EdRedesign) was created to advance a broader, more holistic model of developmental and educational opportunity for all children and youth, especially those affected by racism and poverty, through research, advocacy, and collaborative action. We are catalyzing efforts to design cross-sector community-based systems of support and opportunity to provide all children access to individualized pathways to succeed in school and life from birth to adulthood.

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ENDNOTES

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