



BOSTON COLLEGE

“FOR THEMSELVES AND FOR THEIR CHILDREN”: THE POLITICAL CHALLENGES, NUANCES,
AND TRIUMPHS OF EASTERN KENTUCKY’S SCHOOLS

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“For Themselves and For Their Children”: The Political Challenges, Nuances, and Triumphs of
Eastern Kentucky’s Schools

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Eastern Kentucky, and all of Appalachia, is a place where stories are sacred. I first encountered East Kentucky as a sophomore, a beneficiary of Boston College’s Appa Volunteers Program, which sent me and thirteen friends to Big Creek, Kentucky. In Caudill’s famous *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, Caudill references the diary of a settler who found his way to Big Creek and wrote that when “we reached Big Creek...good people came walking up the road to meet us” (Caudill, 1963). In 2018, we found the same when we arrived.

On a social science level, I was introduced to Appalachia a few months before during my sophomore fall. In American Federalism with Professor Marc Landy, we read Landy’s profile of Kentucky. Landy describes Kentucky as a place that is “the home one never truly leaves,” painting Appalachia as a place of community and radical hospitality (Landy, 1986). Landy’s narrative came to life when I had my first conversation with a woman who lived their whole life in Eastern Kentucky, who for the purposes of this work I will nickname Daisy.

A few friends and I drove to Daisy’s house to drop off a care package from the food pantry. What both surprised and awed me about Daisy was how quickly she welcomed a small group of weirdly accented, young strangers into her little pink house to tell us the story of her life. Daisy also taught us the story of her community, Leslie County, rated by the New York Times as the third toughest place to live in America (Lippen, 2014). Daisy, and all those we met that week in Leslie County greeted us with a sense of radical vulnerability, to tell us stories of their lives, struggles, and families; they served us more than I think we were able to serve them.

The Appalachia stories I have been privileged to come from a variety of authors that include ministers, retirees, former coal miners, social workers, volunteers, construction

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supervisors, coffee shop owners, schoolchildren, and everyone else in-between. For some reason, the story of Eastern Kentucky’s schools was the one that struck me most. Education is often hailed as the great equalizer; however, there is nothing equal about an environment where middle schoolers are often subject to drug testing. There was an injustice there, and the social scientist in me believed there was a political grounding to it. That is where this work begins.

I complete this work and (probably) my time at Boston College having felt a variety of emotions the last few trying weeks; none of those emotions though are as heavy as the gratitude I feel in my heart. For the joy that was my time at BC, I can only be grateful to people. I am thankful to all the people with whom I could debate politics at midnight, sang “Home” and “Country Roads” with on service trips, sat with me during moments of challenge and darkness, and, more than anything, met me with more kindness and love than I could have asked for.

First, I thank my entire family, especially my mom and dad. I consider this work to be a product of them; my dad is a lifelong federal civil servant, his service to our country teaches me what it means to serve others and serve with humility; my mom is a former Catholic school teacher, who inspires me to practice a faith that does justice and fight for a world where every child has a quality education. I always struggle to find the right words to thank my parents, knowing there are no such words to thank the two people who have given me every chance in the world. I also deeply thank my little brother (and Battle of Comm Ave rival) Bryan and my living grandmothers, whose support has nourished me and this work in many ways. And though they are no longer with me, my late Jesuit educated grandfathers, whose love from afar has taught me to see “God in all things” at Boston College.

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Second, to my advisor, Marc Landy, a mentor of mine since my first days at Boston College. I thank him for his mentorship, sage, and shared love and respect for Eastern Kentucky and its people. To many teachers, especially Kathy Bailey, John Buettler, David DiPasquale, Michael Hartney, Kristin Heyer, Pat Maney, and Kathy Posey, without whom I would have struggled to write this small book. I also, for their awesome mentorship and guidance during my time at Boston College, find myself in a great debt of thanks to Chris Darcy and Ellen Modica.

I thank the many friends whose love to me the past few years directly and indirectly supported this project. I especially thank Caroline, Steph, Will, Molly, Steve, Rohit, Eric, John, Kaitlyn, “Walsh 308,” my K193 lead team, other dear friends, and the many other communities and people who have made BC home to me these past four years.

Finally, to the community I dedicate this work to: the Appa Volunteers of Boston College and our community partners. To Kevin, Miss Connie, and Big Creek Missions, Nancy, Brent, and Eastern Shore Habitat, and Frank, Fr. Andy, and Mon Valley Habitat: the love you have for your communities is infectious and inspiring. To my fellow TLs and Council Members, for inspiring me to give Appa my all and become a better version of myself. I deeply thank my first leaders and role models Andrew Bourque and Katie Kelley, my peers in Big Creek, my participants in Eastern Shore, and last but not least, my participants in Mon Valley, who gave me the best last week of college I could have asked for. To Kelly Hughes, my Program Director, thank you for supporting me, forming me, and challenging me to grow both as a leader and person. Finally, I thank my two co-leads Gianna Cancemi and Caitlin Mahoney, who through who they are as people, remind me every day what loving, learning, and serving is really all about.

-Coll, 3/25/20

Chapter 1: “The Birthright of Every Citizen”: An Introduction

“The equality of educational opportunity must be the birthright of every citizen,” remarked thirty-sixth President of the United States Lyndon Baines Johnson (Johnson, 1967). Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society hoped to ensure the equality of *opportunity* to every American. Some of Johnson’s formative years were spent teaching impoverished Mexican-American children in Southwest Texas, sixty miles from the US-Mexico border (Block, 2014). In working in an under resourced public school, Johnson was inspired to work for an America where “no child will go unfed and no youngster will go unschooled” (Nichols, 2014).

The Great Society had a special, yet often forgotten target: Appalachia. Lyndon Johnson fired the first shot of his War on Poverty from the front steps of a cabin in Inez, a small town in the rural, remote Martin County in Eastern Kentucky. On his tour across America in 1964, Johnson saw poverty in Appalachia as something which more Americans needed to be aware of. After passing through Eastern Kentucky on his trip, Johnson stressed that “we will not win our war against poverty until the conscience of the entire nation is aroused” (Wicker, 1964). Johnson’s hope was that the issues facing Eastern Kentucky and other rural areas would become more familiar. Johnson hoped that America would no longer have to be continuously introduced to Appalachian poverty but would instead be already educated in such a way that would inspire policy action.

In 1965, Johnson pushed the Appalachia Regional Development Act (ARDA) through Congress (ARC, n.d.). ARDA created the Appalachia Regional Commission (ARC), which would receive annual federal funds to address Appalachian interests. A true progressive, Johnson believed in the power of government to positively affect the lives of the poor and the

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marginalized. Much of the recent stories of Appalachian poverty continue to be shaped by institutions like the ARC.

However, in 2020, Lyndon Johnson would find his Great Society did not fully come to fruition. Whether the failure came from structural inadequacies in Great Society programs or because during twenty of the twenty-four years after Lyndon Johnson’s Presidency a Republican sat in the Oval Office is irrelevant to the conversation at hand. What is relevant is that instead of becoming the beacon of American prosperity in rural communities, Inez, Kentucky today is seen only as a token of Appalachian poverty. One Inez resident put it best in 2014, when she noted “any time somebody wanted to do a story on poor people, we were the first stop” (Fessler, 2014). Yet, despite the occasional newspaper article about struggling small towns, the strip-mined mountains and rolling hills seen from the highways mask the striking poverty tucked away in Appalachian small communities. The smoke rising from blown-off mountaintops is not the Great Society that Johnson envisioned.

Instead of a Great Society, what happened was exactly what Lyndon Johnson feared: an America where the policy challenges of small, rural communities still evades the American consciousness. As Michael Harrington once found in *The Other America*, poverty in rural America “is often off the beaten track,” where travelers could never see behind the “perennial masks of poverty” (Harrington, 1962). Our contemporary American political culture has defined states in middle America, with heavy rural populations and a lack of large population centers, as “flyover states.” Furthermore, when America’s eyes and press turns to Appalachia, the region is painted as a white monolith, despite the fact that some parts of Appalachia are twenty percent

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black (ARC, 2019). Too often are the desires and opinions of Appalachians excluded, misstated, and misunderstood.

Repeated at many a Trump rally in 2016 were the words that “the forgotten men and women of this country will be forgotten no longer” (Trump, 2016). These words, uttered by Trump incessantly at campaign rallies in 2015 and 2016, were always greeted by a reflexive applause from the crowd. In the aftermath of the 2016 election, exit polls revealed President Trump’s strength in “forgotten” rural areas. In 2008, John McCain outran Barack Obama by a mere eight points in rural areas; in 2016, Donald Trump outpaced Hillary Clinton by twenty-eight points (Kurtzleben, 2016). Specifically, 95 percent of counties in Greater Appalachia voted for Trump (Lilly, Todd, Higgans, & Finn, 2017). While Thomas Frank’s *What’s the Matter with Kansas* and similar texts may suggest there is something intrinsically distorted about rural communities voting for Trump, such arguments neglect the political culture of rural communities. In her groundbreaking *The Politics of Resentment*, Kathy Cramer finds in rural communities that political resentment is deeply rooted in the concepts of “respect, knowledge, and understanding” (Cramer, 2016). The strength of the Trump campaign was how it played to rural resentment, to hold rallies throughout flyover states and small towns, trying to demonstrate to frustrated rural communities that someone was listening to them.

The 2016 election cycle did bring a renewed interest from the media and academia in rural America (Scott, 2018). Topical discussions of the policy challenges facing rural America have included a myriad of issues from poverty, the decline of coal, and the nationwide opioid crisis. However, one issue feels particularly unaddressed: schools. For all the talk about forgotten men and women, there is rarely *any* talk of forgotten schoolchildren in the mainstream political

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discourse. In rural communities, citizens understand their local school as “the most important business in town” (Cramer, 2016). School districts are often the most reliable employer in smaller American communities. For most rural communities, the town school is the most critical, yet invisible and unaddressed, part of their identity.

Throughout *The Politics of Resentment*, many of Cramer’s interviewees discussed the topic of education and their complaints that the government was ignoring them; however, the two variables, education and government, were not put together. This project seeks to explore the relationship between the federal, state, and local government and local school districts in distressed rural communities. This project seeks to amplify the volume of an oft-silenced policy conversation (education) in an oft-neglected area (Eastern Kentucky’s economically distressed Appalachian coal counties).

Thesis Question and Argument:

Education reform takes a village to be designed, constructed, and implemented. The village includes students, parents, teachers, principals, and superintendents but also relies heavily on a variety of government institutions at the local, state, and federal level. Education reform is complicated; special interests factor heavily into reform attempts and any reform will create scores of impassioned clientele groups. Critically, most architects involved in the design of educational policy are intrinsically political bodies. It would be naive to ignore the role of politics in attempts to reform our schools. It would be even more naive to ignore the fact that so few of the actors involved in shaping educational policy have any experience with administering schools in rural America.

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In this work, I explore how responsive federal, state, and local bodies of government are at responding to the needs of underresourced schools in Eastern Kentucky’s rural, economically distressed coal counties. Eastern Kentucky’s students are behind from the educational starting-line; inequalities in public health, child development, and economic status cannot be ameliorated in one piece of legislation, let alone decades of legislation. However, some low SES school districts are able to catch-up, by improving at rates higher than the national average. This project’s central argument is that a truly responsive government is one that makes serious financial investments in underresourced school districts, thus producing better educational outcomes.

The Model of Educational Opportunity presented in Chapter Three presents a starting point for where to measure educational achievement gaps in Eastern Kentucky. The model separates school districts into five categories of quality from excellent (Category I) to poor (Category V). This model emphasizes the importance of measuring student improvement and theorizes that responsive political representatives and equitable funding allocations are key forces behind improved student outcomes. At the conclusion of this project, I expect to find a symbiotic relation between effective political representation, funding levels, and student improvement at the individual district level.

Chapter Preview:

As a whole, this project can be best understood in two parts. Part I consists of Chapters One through Seven, where case selection, methods, qualitative research, and quantitative data will be thoroughly broken down.

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Chapter Two presents how and why the case subjects for this project were chosen. This chapter also includes a response to potential critiques of how the project’s subject matter and case selection.

Chapter Three covers the methods of this project. The chapter begins with an examination of the case selection process and a response to potential critiques of my process. Then, the chapter will cover the qualitative methods: specifically, the reliance on political development as a tracing mechanism to provide context to data points. Finally, the chapter will provide an overview of my quantitative methodology, detailing how I go about measuring individual school districts in Eastern Kentucky, as well as the dataset as a whole. Here, I will define what I mean by “starting-line inequalities” and “inequalities in mitigation” or “mitigating inequalities.” Additionally, this chapter will outline my Model of Educational Opportunity Creation, from which the school districts will be evaluated.

Chapter Four will address Martha Derthick’s big question of American federalism: “How Many Communities” (Derthick, 1999). This chapter will take a political development approach in evaluating the trajectory of the roles played by federal, state, and local governments in the administration of public schools throughout American history. In this chapter, I will find that until 1983 education policymaking mirrored the movements of American federalism before proving to be an exception to national trends in public policy.

Chapter Five will continue to rely on a political development approach with the focus being on Eastern Kentucky’s political culture. I will begin my survey at the founding of the state to examine the origins of the region’s political culture, economic development, and environmental groundings. In this section, I will address the growth, decline, and the role of the

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coal industry, critical to understanding both the region and this work. This chapter will also review the region’s history of political representation, the current political climate, and the arrival of the opioid crisis.

Chapter Six provides a thorough evaluation of the multifaceted factors that play into school performance. In my overview of “starting-line” factors, I will predict that the inequalities faced by students in the remote rural schools at the starting line should manifest through below average fourth grade test scores and will likely be categorized as a “low opportunity” school district. Similarly, my cursory analysis of “mitigating factors” will predict that below-average school funding and political voice should result in the remote rural set being categorized as a “regressing” school district.

Chapter Seven concludes Part I of this work. This chapter will utilize a data-first approach in regards to measuring Eastern Kentucky’s schools. In this chapter, I will evaluate if the shortfalls in proficiency and improvement that I predicted in Chapter Five come to fruition.. At the conclusion of this chapter, I will place the remote, rural schools in the dataset within the categories offered by the Model of Educational Opportunity Creation.

Part III of this project begins in Chapter Eight. In Chapters Eight through Ten, I will apply the results of Part I to federal, state, and local institutions of government. Part I asks two questions to evaluate how responsive each level of government is to the needs of Eastern Kentucky. First, how effective is this level of government at ameliorating inequalities at the starting-line? Second, how adequately are the schools in these remote counties represented by each branch of government considered?

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Chapter Eight turns our focus to federal institutions. I begin the chapter by evaluating existing literature that evaluates federal responsiveness, before evaluating who represents Eastern Kentucky, who in the region uses their political voices, and how well positioned those political actors are to advocate for the region. Then, I apply those theories, moving to analyze how effectively the federal government responds to and mitigates inequalities in Eastern Kentucky. Here, I pay particular attention to school funding data and correlations to school performance to appraise the role of the federal government.

Chapter Nine addresses the state of Kentucky. Here, I will establish how, even in the state of Kentucky, our selected counties are left behind. I will use the methods of analysis similar to the ones I used in Chapter Seven to evaluate Kentucky’s response to Eastern Kentucky’s remote rural school district.

Chapter Ten examines the role of local bodies of government. I find that some local county governments are performing as the “laboratories of democracy” that Louis Brandeis hoped for, while others are struggling. Here, I look to the ingenuity of some Eastern Kentucky counties whose practices and policies have made their schools mediums of social mobility. Still, I will pay attention to the tremendous economic disadvantages local governments face in adequately funding their school system.

Finally, Chapter Eleven synthesizes the work and offers this project’s conclusions. Here, I will highlight and connect the major findings of this work. I will conclude by attempting to close this project with an uplifting note, despite the unfortunate discoveries this work produced.

Chapter 2: Case Selection

Chapter Overview:

This chapter will seek to provide an overview how the dataset for this project was compiled. Additionally, this chapter will respond to potential critiques of how these cases were selected. Before addressing the findings of this work, it is important to define the scope of this work.

To focus on the roles played by different levels of government on all remote rural schools across the country would not be possible. There is no easy solution to the crises of rural schools and rural problems, largely because of the incredible diversity of America’s rural areas. There is no true definition of what “rural America” is. Clay County, Kentucky, placed in the hills of Appalachia is a rural area, as is the Mississippi Delta, Northern California, the Thlopthlocco Tribal Town in Oklahoma, the Eastern Shore of Virginia, the farmlands of Northwestern Maine, and the bluffs of Northeastern Montana. There is no single area within rural America that provides a clear, working definition of the words “rural America.” Simply put, the nature of “rural America” is diverse. Different rural areas have different challenges and political cultures, influenced by a range of factors including but not limited to settlement, racism, the environment, industry, and many others. As a result, this work will center its focus on one particular rural area: Appalachia.

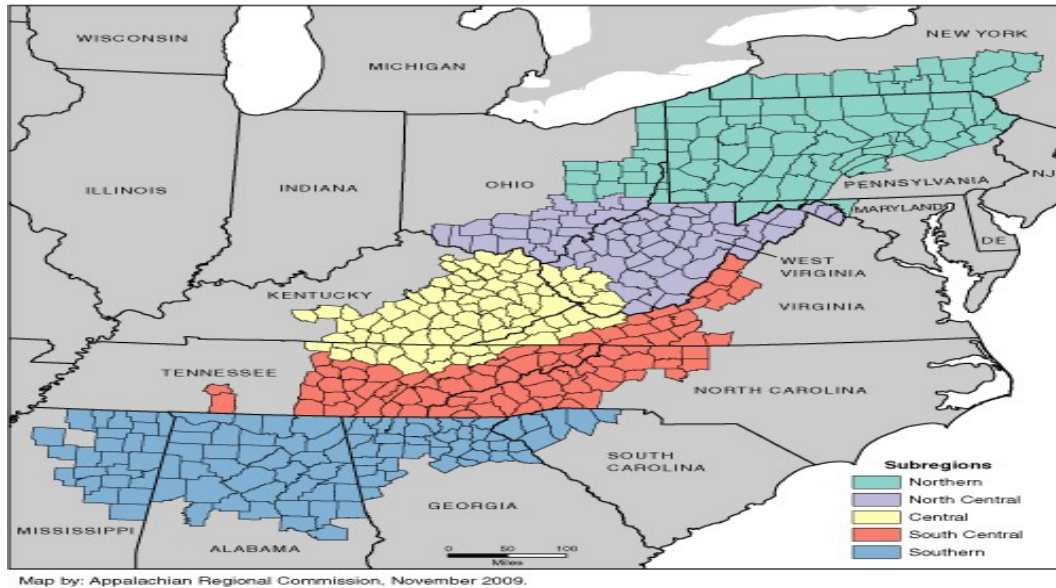
Case Selection:

Specifically, the schools studied in this work are K-12 public school districts and of the following characteristics: first, located in the Central Appalachia Region; second, located in the state of Kentucky; third, located in a coal county; fourth, located in a “distressed” county.

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Appalachia itself is a region of great size and diversity. The Appalachian Mountains run from Upstate New York and stretch as far down as Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. As a result, the Appalachia Regional Commission divides Appalachia into five regions: Northern, North Central, Central, South Central, and Southern, all pictured in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Regions of Appalachia



There are over four hundred counties in Appalachia, far too many to address in this project. For the purposes of this work, I will be focusing on the region of Central Appalachia. When Lyndon Johnson declared War on Poverty, Appalachia was poorer than the national average by over ten points (Ziliak, 2012). However, with a poverty rate approaching 60 percent, the counties of Central Appalachia experienced poverty at a rate nearly double than the country outside of Appalachia (Ziliak, 2012). In 1960, only seventeen percent of high school students in Central Appalachia graduated with a diploma, over twenty points lower than the national average. (Ziliak, 2012). Simply put, at the time the Appalachia Regional Development Act passed Congress in 1965, Central Appalachia was in need of national care and support. Putting aside

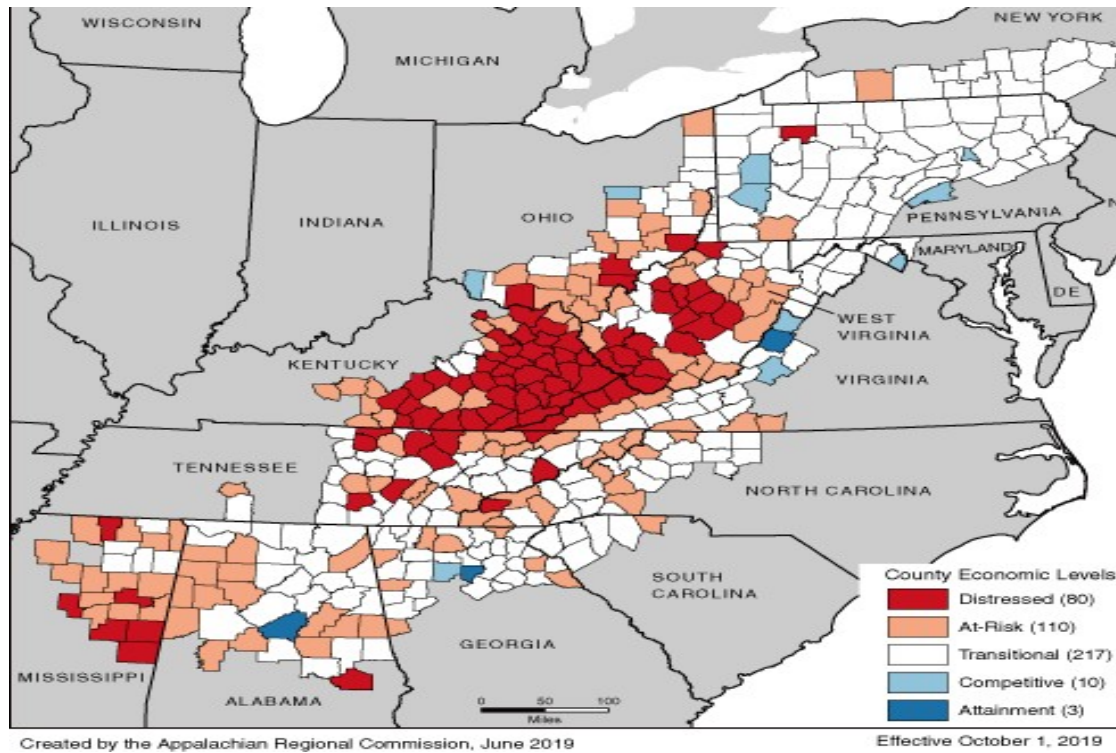
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debates as to how successful the Great Society was in Central Appalachia, poverty rates dipped from 58 percent in 1960 to 23 percent in 2010 (Ziliak, 2012). However, the rate of poverty in Central Appalachia is still double the national average (Ziliak, 2012). A 2014 survey found that six of the ten toughest places to live in America are in Appalachia; specifically, the six in the report are all in Eastern Kentucky (Flippen, 2014).

Still, Central Appalachia as an entire region is still too broad for a study on how different levels of government respond to the needs of disadvantaged rural schools. Specifically, four states have counties in Central Appalachia: West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. As this work seeks to study the interactions between federal, state, and local bodies and rural schools, it bears importance to narrow the data to a single state. In this project, our case will be Kentucky.

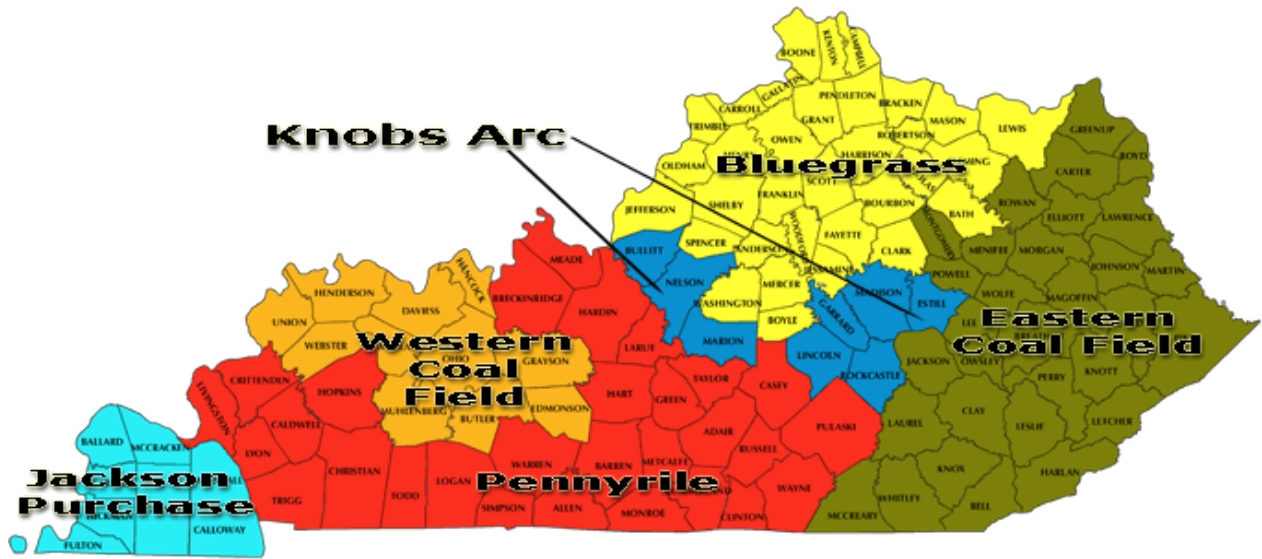
Even so, there are fifty-four counties in Central Appalachia, too many to thoroughly analyze NAEP data, policy trends, school finance, voter behavior, political influence, and so on. As a result, three more restrictions will be made. The first restriction is that this work will focus on “distressed counties.” Every year, the Appalachia Regional Commission designated each of Appalachia’s counties as one of five distinctions: attainment, competitive, transitional, at-risk, or distressed based off of each county’s three-year unemployment rate, per capita market income, and poverty rates (Appalachia Regional Commission, 2019). A “distressed county” would place in the bottom ten percent of all the nation’s counties in those three statistical areas. As demonstrated by Figure 2.2, thirty-eight counties in Kentucky meet that definition.

Figure 2.2: County Economic Status, FY 2020



Next, this paper will limit the scope of school districts to those in distressed, Central Appalachian counties in which coal has been historically produced. Luckily, our scope of school districts studied is now at a more comfortable twenty-five. The range of coal producing counties in Kentucky is demonstrated in Figure 2.3. The map of counties selected is included in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.3: Kentucky Coal-Producing Counties

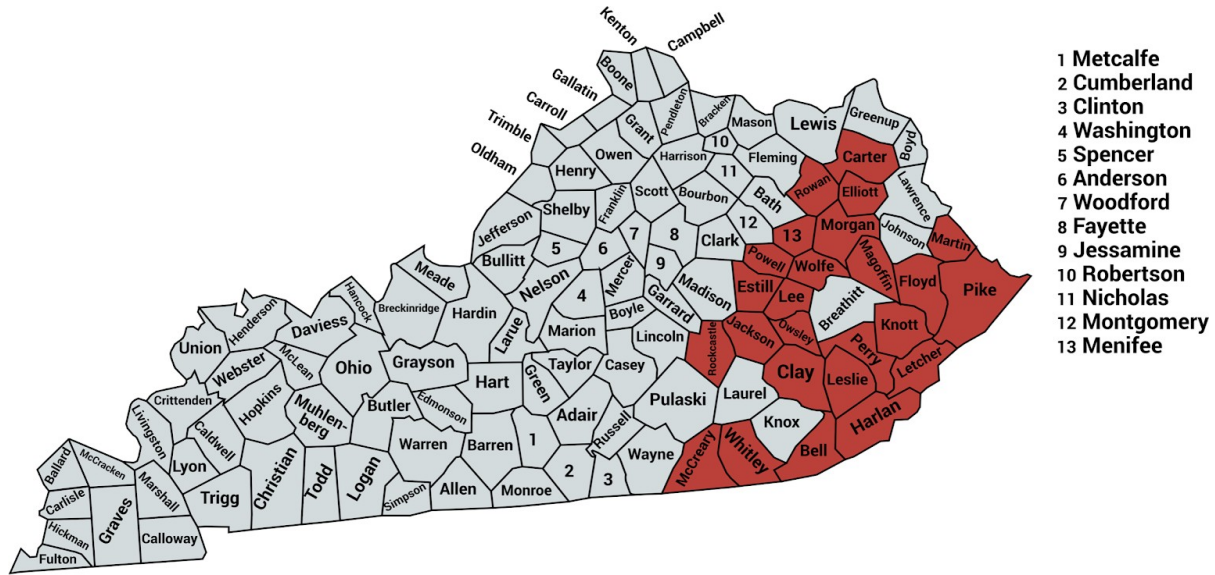


Finally, this paper will address the ruralness of rural schools. The Census Bureau breaks American population zones into three categories: urbanized areas, urban clusters, and rural areas (United States Census Bureau, 2010). An urbanized area is a population center of more than 50,000 people (Census Bureau, 2010). An urban cluster is an area populated by anywhere between 2,500 and 49,999 individuals (Census Bureau, 2010). Rural areas include all locales not contained in an urban area (Census Bureau, 2010). The National Center for Education Statistics breaks rural schools into three clusters, in respect to their proximity to urban centers or clusters: fringe, distant, and remote (United States Department of Education, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics defines a remote rural school as being in a “census defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster” (United States Department of Education, 2006). My focus will be on schools in the remote, rural counties in the dataset.

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After accounting for ruralness in distressed former Appalachian coal counties, a few school districts do not count in this analysis. For example, Breathitt County’s population size renders it a town instead of a rural area (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Johnson, Knox, and Lawrence Counties are excluded for similar reasons. Although those three counties are incredibly similar to the counties studied, their inclusion in the data set would create a problem of measurement. Figure 2.4 includes the counties selected for this work.

Figure 2.4: Counties Selected for Dataset



The annual National Assessment for Education Process (NAEP), which is the largest indicator of student academic proficiency, breaks down performance by types of rural public schools. Breakdowns of NAEP scores by the extent of a district’s ruralness have shined light on the struggles of remote rural schools. The most recent NAEP scores from 2017 demonstrate that remote rural schools have performed worse on standardized testing than their fringe and distant rural counterparts, demonstrated in Table 2.1.

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Table 2.1: Average scale scores for Grade 8 reading, by School Location, 12 categories (Fischman, 2015)

Year	Jurisdiction	School location, 12 categories	Average scale score
2017	National public	Rural, fringe	267
2017	National public	Rural, distant	262
2017	National public	Rural, remote	261

As previewed in Table 1, in all NAEP reports since 2007, remote rural institutions have performed worse on standardized tests than their fringe and distant rural counterparts (US Department of Education). Additionally, distant rural schools also find themselves at the bottom of the educational achievement ladder. Interestingly, fringe rural schools traditionally perform better than the national average in reading and math (Fishman, 2015). Our selected counties in Appalachia vary in scope of ruralness, the details of which are included in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Counties Selected by Extent of Ruralness

Fringe Rural Districts (6)	Distant Rural Districts (7)	Remote Rural Districts (12)
Carter County	Bell County	Elliott County
Clay County	Estill County	Jackson County
Harlan County	Floyd County	Knott County
Perry County	Leslie County	Lee County
Rockcastle County	Pike County	Letcher County

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Whitley County	Powell County	Magoffin County
	Rowan County	Martin County
		McCreary County
		Menifee County
		Morgan County
		Owsley County
		Wolfe County

The dataset examined in this work provides a sufficient number of rural schools of all stripes. Such a range will prove useful to compare proficiency in reading and math in these districts to others in the region, state, and country throughout this work. I plan on providing a thorough evaluation of the dataset as a whole, however my focus is on the schools in remote rural areas.

Response to Likely Critiques of Case Selection:

A critique of my work I would expect is that I am “cherry picking” a result through the counties I chose to study in this project. Some would say that my selection of economically distressed rural communities in Eastern Kentucky is bound to produce a result that will have empirical achievement gaps, funding shortages, and a demonstration of political ignorance that fuels a regional politics of resentment towards elites. However, I would point out that many of the lessons found in the set of school districts can be applied elsewhere. While my attempt to provide an accurate analysis relies on a set of counties bearing regional, environmental, and economical similarity, I would strongly contend that the lessons of my project can be applied in other rural communities in two ways: first, in understanding that Appalachia is not a monolith

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and second, providing a method to analyze rural schools and resentment politics that can be operationalized in other regions nationally.

First, those who argue that my selection of economically distressed coal county school districts in Appalachia are often those that see Appalachia as monolithic. If one only read J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elogy*, the most influential text on Appalachia since Caudill’s *Cumberlands*, one could receive a mistaken picture of Appalachia. Two problems emerge out of Vance’s narrative: misuse of narrative and hasty generalization. *Hillbilly Elogy*, at its most basic level, is a story. The story is that of Vance’s family and observations about growing up on the outskirts of Appalachia in Middletown, Ohio. Vance himself even notes in the text that “this book is not an academic study” (Vance, 2016). Yet, many analyses of *Hillbilly Elogy* have used Vance’s text for a different reason: an explanation for the last election. In such an effort, the single story of Vance’s family somehow became *the* story for all of Appalachia.

In the substitution of Appalachia’s story with Vance’s story, *Hillbilly Elogy* and Vance commit the fallacy of hasty generalization. At one point in *Hillbilly Elogy*, Vance opines “this is the reality of our community...Our homes are a chaotic mess. We scream and yell at each other like we are spectators at a football game. At least one member of the family uses drugs – sometimes the father, sometimes the mother, sometimes both” (Vance, 2016). While Vance may be well intentioned, his image of Appalachia does not do the region justice. Vance’s use of “our” and “we” creates a false image of the Appalachian space and its inhabitants.

In *Southern Cultures*, scholar Elizabeth Engelhardt synthesizes this tendency writing that “Appalachia stands out...in the sheer length of time that people have believed it could be explained simply, pithily, and concisely” (Engelhardt, 2017). The truth is that Appalachia is not

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as monolithic as it appears on face values. Another historian Elizabeth Catte argues that literature on Appalachia, whether it comes from J.D. Vance or the *New York Times*, systemically ignores “all nonwhite people, anyone with progressive politics, those who care about the environment, LGBTQ individuals, young folks, and a host of others” (Catte, 2018). While many were quick to label Appalachia as “Trump Country” following the 2016 election, some (correctly) point out that Bernie Sanders performed almost as well in the 2016 West Virginia Democratic Primary as Donald Trump did on the Republican side (Catte, 2018). Although from different ends of the political spectrum, Sanders and Trump both share in their populist approaches. Populism relies on the “moral vilification of elites” and encompasses a promise to “replace the existing corruption with a political order that puts ‘the people’ back at the center” (Lacatus, 2019). Considering the success of Sanders in Appalachia provides an important context to understanding the area’s political culture, a topic explored in greater detail in Chapter Five. Overall, though, these results yield the picture of a region more analogous to the politics of rural resentment captured by Cramer’s *Politics of Resentment* than a monolithic region-in-a-box approach offered by Vance and others.

Second, and furthermore, this work can contribute to a way to understand other communities where rural resentment has been broadcasted. Katherine Cramer’s book, *The Politics of Resentment* left scholars a blueprint to analyze rural consciousness and political resentment. This work’s focus on education seeks to provide another layer to analyses of resentment towards political elites of all party stripes. Additionally, this work will also show how some rural school districts in Appalachia are innovating, improving, and producing positive student outcomes. As a whole, this work hopes to leave a contribution to the literature that will

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make it easier to understand and study rural school districts in economically distressed
communities.

Chapter 3: Theory of Change & Methodology

Chapter Overview:

In this chapter, I seek to outline the methods of analysis which influence the rest of this project. This chapter is organized in four sections: my theory of change, an overview of qualitative methods, an overview of this work’s quantitative methods, and an overview of frequently relied upon data sources. I will make the argument for integrating available data with a political development study of public education and Eastern Kentucky. A holistic analysis of the two will lead us to come to a more complete understanding of how federal, state, and local bodies behave and respond to the needs of Eastern Kentucky. I conclude with this chapter explaining how I will apply the data and findings collected in Chapters Four to Seven to the chapters on federal, state, and local government in Chapters Eight through Ten and the work’s overall conclusions in Chapter Ten.

Theory of Change:

This project’s central goal seeks to understand the interactions between disadvantaged school districts and institutions of government responsible for mitigating existing disadvantages. To measure school performance, I measure how students tested in fourth and eighth grade. I argue that two different types of inequalities have an adverse effect on students, one in each of those two critical years: fourth graders face inequalities at the starting-line, which I term starting-line factors, and eighth graders face inequalities of mitigation, which I term mitigating factors, .

I borrow the term “starting-line factors,” from Schlozman, Verba, and Brady’s 2003 essay “Unequal at the Starting Line” which emphasized how inequality in socioeconomic status (SES)

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in one generation often carries over to the next (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2003). The authors termed that, especially in terms of education, this pattern leaves students “unequal at the starting line,” or kindergarten (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2003). Robert Putnam in *Our Kids* seconds this fact, writing that “early life experiences get under your skin in a most powerful way” (Putnam, 2015, p.115). Putnam also finds that these barriers of childhood development are unevenly distributed by socioeconomic status (Putnam, 2015). I argue that in order to understand why students perform below average in the fourth grade, we need to turn our eyes to starting-line factors that manifest themselves through structures of socioeconomic inequality. Specifically, I argue that factors of public health, child development, and economic inequality correlate with poorer test scores at the starting-line of fourth grade.

In a country heralded for providing every child with a quality education, public schools should not only be measured by where their students are at the starting-line but by how well those schools mitigate those starting line inequalities. A strong public school district can help students make up ground between fourth and eighth grade. This project argues measuring student improvement as a new third way to reconcile debates between those who seek to measure student success through measures of proficiency versus measures of year-to-year growth. However, within my theory of change, I argue that it is not possible for an elementary school principal to wave a magic wand that causes students to improve between fourth grade and eighth grade. A school district needs educational and financial resources to invest in students who are behind at the starting line. I argue that just as under-resourced schools are unequal at the starting line, there are also inequalities in the ability of a school district to mitigate those existing inequalities.

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Unlike the starting-line factors, which I view as equal contributors, I argue that mitigating factors are hierarchical. At the top of the mitigating food chain is political representation. Strong political representation is something I view as a two-way street. From above, if a constituency has its representatives in positions of power, it is easier for their representatives to be positive difference makers in mitigating starting line inequalities. Still, on the other hand, political participation is critical to ensuring strong political representation. An electorate that does not vote, does not call its representatives, and does not respond to issues at hand will provide less incentives for their representatives to effectively represent them. In my model, I argue that effective political representation is a cause of increased access to educational resources, yielding a greater mitigation of starting line inequalities and improved school performance.

These two variables - the starting line and mitigating factors - combine to create the Quigley Model of Educational Opportunity. Table 3.1 diagrams out the Quigley Model of Educational Opportunity Creation, which displays my theory of how the relationships between the variables studied affect one another. Table 3.2 diagrams the category of factors I split the variables into two categories: the three starting-line factors are at the bottom of the hierarchical chart. Table 3.3 details the five categories schools come out of the model as. As explained above, I argue the starting line factors bear equal weight on student outcomes, while political representation is the determinative factor of the three mitigating variables I study.

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Table 3.1: The Quigley Model of Educational Opportunity

<i>Theory of Change</i>	<i>Light Starting-Line Inequalities (7 to 10 4th grade benchmarks)</i>	<i>Average Starting Line Inequalities (4 to 6 of 4th grade benchmarks)</i>	<i>Heavy Starting-Line Inequalities (0 to 3 of 4th grade benchmarks)</i>
<i>Strong Mitigating Structures (13 to 20 of 8th Grade benchmarks)</i>	<i>Category I: High Opportunity, Rising School District</i>	<i>Category II: Medium Opportunity, Rising School District</i>	<i>Category III: Low Opportunity, Rising School District</i>
<i>Average Mitigating Structures (7 to 12 of 8th Grade benchmarks)</i>	<i>Category II: High Opportunity, Average Improvement District</i>	<i>Category III: Medium Opportunity, Average Improvement District</i>	<i>Category IV: Low Opportunity, Average Improvement District</i>
<i>Weak Mitigating Structures (0 to 6 of 8th grade benchmarks)</i>	<i>Category III: High Opportunity, Regressing School District</i>	<i>Category IV: Medium Opportunity, Regressing School District</i>	<i>Category V: Low Opportunity, Regressing School District</i>

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Table 3.2: Factors within the Quigley Model of Educational Opportunity

Factor	Variables Included
Starting-Line Factors	Public Health Child Development Economic Inequality
Mitigating Factors	Political Representation School Effectiveness Government Aid & School Finance

As a whole, the Model of Educational Opportunity is predictive and indicative. An analysis of starting line and mitigating factors in a school district should predict where a school should be placed in the matrix. Additionally, a school district’s placement indicates which factors school districts need to have their representatives respond to. The placement of a school district is dependent on how many educational benchmarks a district meets. In fourth grade, which I correlate as dependent on starting line factors, I measure how schools perform against the national average, regional average, state average, in-state geographical average, and against the NAEP “proficient” benchmark. As demonstrated in the Model of Educational Opportunity, a school that meets zero to three of those benchmarks would be considered “low opportunity,” four to six would be considered “medium opportunity,” and seven to ten “high opportunity.” In eighth grade, I make comparisons to the same benchmarks, however, in the eighth grade, I will calculate for school improvement in my results, comparing the districts to twenty benchmarks instead of ten. Table 3.3 provides further explanation of the categories listed in Table 3.1.

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Table 3.3, Categories within the Model of Educational Opportunity

Category	Placement Benchmark(s) Required
Category I: Excellent School District	1. High Opportunity & Rising
Category II: Above-Average School District	1. High Opportunity & Average Improvement 2. Average Opportunity & High Improvement
Category III: Average School District	1. High Opportunity & Regressing 2. Medium Opportunity & Average Improvement 3. Low Opportunity & High Improvement
Category IV: Below-Average School District	1. Average Opportunity & Regressing 2. Low Opportunity & Average Improvement
Category V: Poor School District	1. Low Opportunity & Regressing

As indicated by the roman numerals listed at the front of each type of school district, the Model of Educational Opportunity divides the nine types of school districts into five category subsets. The categories are numbered from Category I (most optimal) to Category V (least optimal). In Category I is the high opportunity, rising school district. Category I schools tend to have low starting line inequalities and strong local tax bases to invest in students who do fall behind, thus putting their students ahead of peer comparisons by fourth grade and even farther ahead by eighth grade. Based on testing results, the school district of Newton, Massachusetts is one such example of a Category I school (Reardon, et al, 2019). Attending a Category I school district is a premier opportunity for students to succeed. Category II schools are the next best thing to Category I districts. This subcategory includes medium opportunity rising districts and high opportunity average improving school districts. I lump these sets of schools together, as student outcomes in high opportunity districts with average mitigating structures are roughly on par with

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a medium opportunity school district with high improvement scores. Category III includes high opportunity, regressing districts, medium opportunity, average improvement districts, and low opportunity, high improvement districts. These schools provide similar outcomes, however each are products of different policy inequalities, especially at the extremes of this category. A high opportunity, regressing school district is one in need of more resources to continue student success, while a low opportunity, rising school district is one that needs more help at the educational starting line. Category IV schools consist of the medium opportunity, regressing districts and the low opportunity, average improvement districts. Finally, Category V represents low opportunity, regressing districts, where students start behind their peers in fourth grade and manage to fall even further behind in eighth grade. These school districts are one which require a turrent of political force to address inequalities at both ends of the educational performance spectrum.

As a whole, a parent would want to send their child to a high opportunity school district. However, not every family can afford to live in a locale home to a Category I school district. Many children are forced to grow up in districts with average to low educational opportunities. Yet, a parent raising their child in a high poverty area would likely want to send their child to a district more effective at mitigating inequalities at the starting line.

These methods and distinctions will prove critical to the rest of this project. In my qualitative analysis in Chapters Four and Five, the Model of Educational Opportunity is less visible. However, the qualitative findings will serve to provide a better context for evaluating political responsiveness and possible policy remedies in Chapters Eight through Ten. In Chapter Six, I will analyze the state of variables within the Model of Educational Opportunity in Eastern

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Kentucky, to demonstrate the predictive nature of the Model. In Chapter Seven, an analysis of testing results will show definitively which categories the rural, remote set, along with the individual school districts should be placed in. Using the results of school performance in Chapter Seven, I look to where school districts in the dataset start to fall behind. In Chapters Eight through Ten, I will look to the Model to analyze what institutions of government should be responding to and analyze how responsive they are to the needs of the schools considered.

Qualitative Methods:

Critically, while this work will examine data from a wide variety of sources but is aware that no source listed above should be considered an end-all, be-all. Just as no single rural school can speak to the challenges of another rural school, no single datapoint can paint a complete picture of the problem studied. It would not be possible to reach conclusions about political responsiveness without knowing the history of the issues being debated and the political culture shaping the settings in which politicians respond.

The qualitative method this work relies upon is the model of American Political Development (APD). An APD model seeks to examine the “temporal dimensions of governance” (John, 2014). Within APD are two key trains of study, one which studies institutional change and one which studies political culture (Glenn, 2004). In this work, I intend to use both of those approaches, each in different ways.

In an effort to understand how school policy is shaped, I will take an institutional change approach. Through an examination of Martha Derthick’s federalism question - “How Many Communities?” - I will study how the roles of institutions in education policymaking have changed over time. My focus is on how the extent of federal, state, and local powers over public

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schools have evolved through history and whether those trends the distributions of institutional power in other areas of public policy.

In my study of Eastern Kentucky, I rely on the second track of APD studies in examining the region’s political culture. To understand political realities, the context of place matters. Some elements of place can be gleaned through cursory statistical understanding, however, relying on pure emperics does not tell a complete story of any place. Place best understood as a critical foundation, like that of a home. Yet, people and their stories, like the siding, paint, or texture of a house, give a place character and significance. A political cultural analysis of Eastern Kentucky seeks to understand the habits of the heart held by people of the region. Such an understanding will provide context to the environment in which political decisions are made and the extent to which cries for political help are heard.

Consequently, the political development account of education policy in America as well as the political culture account of Eastern Kentucky will complement the data used in this work. Through an understanding of the political development of America’s schools and of politics in Eastern Kentucky, I will establish the context for data points to be better applied. The combination of both political development models and available data makes it possible to form the project’s conclusions.

Quantitative Methods Overview:

In 2007, educational reformer Michelle Rhee was appointed Chancellor of the Washington, D.C. Public Schools system. Rhee’s chancellorship embodied the consequences of the “accountability-based” era in American public schools (Whitmore, 2011; Ravitch, 2010). Rhee’s decision making rested on a data-first calculus where test scores were viewed as the sole

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measurement of student success. Rhee’s efforts were reflected nationally: the growth of the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) data explorer for National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing is a key example of how student success across states, counties, and other demographic variables are so easily broken down into data points. Test scores do not tell the entire story of student success in a given school district; however, NAEP score equivalents are an effective tool in measuring how a school district or type of school district is faring in regards to its counterparts. In this section, I will seek to detail how I intend to go about measuring NAEP scores and effectiveness of schools in the dataset.

For this part of the chapter, I will outline how I measure the factors incorporated in the Model of Educational Opportunity: public health, child development, economic inequalities, political representation, school funding, and school performance. After previewing the variables I weigh in measuring inequalities at the starting line and inequalities of mitigation, I will launch into an extended discussion of how I measure school performance within the Model of Educational Opportunity.

Measuring Starting Line Factors:

Chapter Six will focus on measuring inequalities at the starting line and inequalities in harm mitigation. In this chapter, I will measure several characteristics to assess the schools in the dataset on each category. I use the data available to generate six outputs: the full dataset, distant rural areas, fringe rural areas, remote rural areas, the rest of Kentucky, and the US as a whole. The focus of this work is on the remote rural schools, however, the statistics for the entire dataset are useful in demonstrating that the remote areas fall even further behind their peers. During that chapter, and the rest of the work, I will frequently use “dataset” in reference to all of the Eastern

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Kentucky school districts selected and use “remote set” or “rural remote set” to refer to results to the rural remote school districts selected. Table 3.4 details the breadth of factors considered in each of the categories, presented by order of consideration in the Chapter.

Table 3.4: Factors Considered in Starting-Line Variables

Category	Variables Included
Public Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State Health Factor County Ranking 2. Obesity Rate 3. Flu Shot Recipient Rate 4. Disability Rate 5. Person to Physician Rate 6. Person to Mental Health Professional Rate
Child Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rate of Mothers Receiving Prenatal Care 2. Rate of Mothers Smoking During Pregnancy 3. Low-Birth Weights Rate 4. Teen Birth Rate 5. Adult Educational Attainment Rates 6. Foster Care Rate 7. Rate of Children Living with Grandparents
Economic Inequality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unemployment Rate 2. Child Poverty Rate 3. Deep Poverty Rate 4. Children Living in High Poverty Areas Rate

I argue that in combination, these variables will be predictive of how children perform when they are first subjected to NAEP testing in the fourth grade. I caution that the factors listed above are not an exhaustive list of all of the factors that leave students behind at the starting line, let alone an exhaustive list of factors that leave students behind in each of the three categories. However, I will demonstrate that these factors are highly predictive of student performance in fourth grade test scores.

Measuring Mitigating Factors:

The Model of Educational Opportunity accounts for the potential of student performance between fourth and eighth grade. I theorize that schools that are “rising” are beneficiaries of what I term strong mitigating structures. There are school districts that make up for serious starting line inequalities. One such district is the Chicago Public School District, where the district made up for a full year of learning and caught students up to speed (Badger and Quealy, 2017). The Model of Educational Opportunity argues that just as inequalities exist at the starting line, there are also inequalities in factors of mitigation. There are reasons why some districts start behind and improve and others start behind and manage to fall even further behind. In my model, I identify three ways in which starting line inequalities are mitigated: effective political representation, more funding to mitigate inequalities, better funded public schools, and thus, rates of school improvement that exceed the national average. Figure 3.1 outlines how I believe inequalities at the starting line in education can be corrected by strong factors of mitigation.

Figure 3.1: Theory of Mitigation

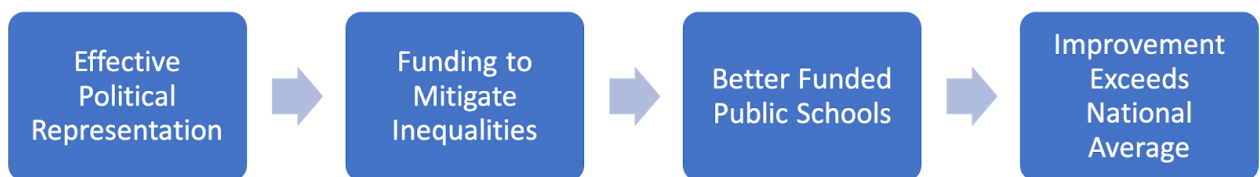


Table 3.5 outlines the variables I consider within each of the three mitigating factors I examine.

Table 3.5: Factors Considered in Mitigating Variables

Category	Variables Included
Political Representation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Representatives Per District Over Time (Federal, State, and Local) 2. Voting Participation & Behavior 3. Representatives Serving on key Legislative Committees
School Finance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Federal Funding 2. State Funding 3. Local Funding
School Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. District NAEP Equivalent vs. National, Regional, State, and Geographic Peers & NAEP Proficiency (4th and 8th Grade) 2. District NAEP Improvement vs. National, Regional, State, and Geographic Peers & NAEP “Proficient vs. Proficient” (8th Grade Only)

Once again, these factors are not conclusive but are extremely predictive of how responsive different branches of government are and how effective the school districts they represent are at mitigating starting-line inequalities. Inequalities of mitigation are difficult to empirically measure. As Schlozman, Verba, and Brady point out, there is no existing empirical evidence on how responsive governmental institutions are on a societal level; however, they also stress that it can be found in case-by-case examinations that institutions are more responsive to some people more than others (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2018). Furthermore, while the extent and differential of which cannot be measured, many cases are found in which governmental institutions are responsive to people of higher socioeconomic status and few, if any, cases are found where governmental institutions are responsive to the needs of those with lower socioeconomic status (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2018). While an examination of how

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responsive federal, state, and local bodies are to the starting line and mitigating inequalities experienced in Eastern Kentucky cannot be perfectly quantified, combining qualitative and empirical evidence will demonstrate in this case if each body of government is responsive to their schools or not.

In measuring inequalities of mitigation, the Model of Educational Opportunity has limits in how far it can be applied. One of the key variables I study here changes gross political representation over time. The combined impact of the Supreme Court’s rulings in *Baker v. Carr* and *Reynolds v. Sims* with the decline in America’s rural population has resulted in a decline of the political voice held by rural Americans, especially on a federal level. In today’s America, it is standard for three or more rural school districts to be represented by one state representative and a large, urban school district in that state to be represented by nine state representatives. In so far as we correlate voice to votes, population decline in rural America serves to limit the voice of rural school districts. This is not to say that individuals in cities with low socioeconomic status have direct pipelines to better representation and better schools; as research tends to indicate, that is not the case (Schlozman, Verba, Brady, 2003). However, in rural America, the nature of spread-out political representation poses difficulties reflected in the Model of Educational Opportunity. I note that while I believe this model and the factors considered to pose great opportunities to study remote, rural school districts, the political representation measurements would need to be needed to fully apply this model to large, urban school districts.

Measuring Student Performance-I: Sample Size Evaluated

As numerous experts can attest, test scores should not be the end-all, be-all in measuring student success. However, test scores are incredibly useful in measuring where a school district,

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or set of districts, match up against their local, state, geographical, and national peers. In my measurements of test scores, I aggregated counties in my dataset by the extent of their rurality, with fringe, distant, and remote rural being the three available designations. Table 2.2 previously cited in this chapter demonstrates the county distribution.

Although there are more rural remote schools than schools of the other categories, the total number of students in the three regional subcategories are comparable in size. Table 3.6 provides the number of students in each of the subcategories and Table 3.7 shows the total enrollment for the schools in the dataset.

Table 3.6: Average Amount of 8th Grade Students by Geographical Subcategory (Reardon et al, 2019)

Type of District	Average Number of Students in 8th Grade, 2009-2015	Percentage of Dataset Enrollment
Dataset Total	6,304	N/A
<i>Fringe Set</i>	2,209	35.2%
<i>Distant Set</i>	2,340	37.3%
<i>Remote Set</i>	1,742	27.7%

Table 3.7: Total Enrollment in Dataset Schools (Reardon et al, 2019)

Type of District	Total Enrollment	Percentage of Dataset
Dataset Total	72,298	N/A
<i>Fringe Set</i>	23,139	32.01%
<i>Distant Set</i>	27,364	37.85%
<i>Remote Set</i>	21,795	30.15%

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Too often, rural school districts are dismissed by policymakers due to their small size. However, students in rural communities make up 18 percent of the American student population (Malkus 2018). As a collective, the school districts in our dataset encompass a mass of students that deserve our study. Books have been written about Michelle Rhee’s chancellorship in the District of Columbia; while roughly 25,000 more students attend schools in the Eastern Kentucky dataset than the DCPS (NCES). As a whole, the size of students in our dataset districts would combine to make up a school district substantially larger than that of big cities, including Atlanta, Boston, and San Francisco (NCES). On a sub-category level, the remote set has a total enrollment slightly larger than cities like Kansas City and South Bend (NCES). More on the topic of rural school district size and political representation will be introduced later in this chapter.

Measuring Student Performance-II: Proficiency vs. Growth and a “Third Way” Theory

Educational policy literature is home to many debates over what makes a school “good,” however, the literature tends to agree on a definition of school quality as “the investment and consumption value of education” (Ladd and Loeb, 2013). Nonetheless, there is little consensus on what makes a good investment and what dividends of education suggest a good value (Ladd and Loeb, 2013). At the heart of the question of how to measure school districts is the debate between using “proficiency” or “growth” in measuring student success (Wong, 2017). Each method of measurement has its own promises and pitfalls.

Proficiency measurements are dictated by performance benchmarks on a standardized test, which in the case of America’s public schools is the NAEP. The National Center for Education Statistics breaks down levels of achievement into three levels: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic (NCES). In layman's terms, students testing at the “advanced” benchmark

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are well above their grade level, students testing “proficient” generally meet or slightly exceed the skills needed for their grade level, students testing “basic” display “partial mastery” and are close to or slightly below grade level, while “below basic” scores are meant to display that students are falling dangerously behind. Tables 3.8 and 3.9 display the performance benchmarks needed to be met for each level for fourth and eighth grade respectively.

Table 3.8: NAEP Benchmarks for 4th Graders Since 2009 (NCES, 2019)

4th Grade	Reading	Math
Below Basic	207 and below	213 and below
Basic	208-237	214-248
Proficient	238-267	249-281
Advanced	267 and above	282 and above

Table 3.9: NAEP Benchmarks for 8th Graders Since 2009 (NCES, 2019)

8th Grade	Reading	Math
Below Basic	242 and below	261 and below
Basic	243-280	262-298
Proficient	281-322	299-332
Advanced	323 and above	333 and above

On one hand, proficiency might seem like a slam-dunk way to measure school performance across states. However, as alluded to in Chapter Four’s discussion of NCLB, each state has the right to dictate what “proficient” means to them. The 2007 NAEP results from Arizona and Minnesota exemplify the problem of funding formulas and state comparisons based on

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proficiency. In fourth grade reading, both Arizona and Minnesota reported 66 percent of their students were proficient and reading at grade level (Paulson, 2009). However, in examining the NAEP scores of the two states, Minnesota students were performing much better than Arizona, whose standards were lower (Paulson, 2009). Frighteningly though, when using the NAEP benchmarks, neither state was performing particularly well: 37 percent of Minnesota’s students met the NAEP benchmarks while only 25 percent of Arizona’s did (Paulson, 2009). Lowered state standards allowed Minnesota to juke its proficiency numbers by 29 percent and Arizona by 41 percent.

Critics of proficiency-based standards are quick to point out that standards between states have varied 76 points on the NAEP between the states with the highest and lowest standards as recently as 2013 (NCES). Furthermore, most states have standards exceedingly below the NAEP benchmarks. Table 3.10 shows the disparities between national and state benchmarks, using state standards against the NAEP standards in 2009 and 2015, the first and last years of testing examined in our dataset. Table 3.11 compares the difference between Kentucky state standards and national standards for 4th Grade Reading in 2015. Table 3.11 also includes the average NAEP score for the entire dataset as a point of reference to show the gap between average test scores in the dataset for that year versus the national proficiency average.

Table 3.10: State vs. National Proficiency Benchmarks, 2009 & 2015 (NCES, 2019)

4th Grade Reading	2009	2015
State Proficiency Level in NAEP Below Basic Range	35 States	4 States
State Proficiency Level in NAEP Basic Range	15 States	41 States
State Proficiency Level in	0 States	2 States

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NAEP Proficient Range		
State Proficiency Level in NAEP Advanced Range	0 States	0 States

Table 3.11: Kentucky State Standards Versus National Standards (NCES, 2019)

2015 Test Scores	Dataset Estimated NAEP Score	Kentucky Proficient Benchmark	NAEP Proficient Benchmark	Difference between Dataset Score and KY Proficiency	Difference between Dataset Score and NAEP Proficiency
4th Grade Reading	226	227	238	-1 point	-12 points
4th Grade Math	238	243	249	-5 points	-11 points
8th Grade Reading	265	260	281	+5 points	-16 points
8th Grade Math	276	277	299	-1 point	-23 points

If one were to measure the schools in the dataset against Kentucky’s idea of proficiency, the results would paint a much kinder picture of Eastern Kentucky’s schools. However, relying on national standards it is evident that students in Kentucky start off behind national standards in fourth grade and are even farther behind national standards by eighth grade.

Like proficiency measurements, using “growth” to evaluate schools also brings positives and significant drawbacks. In education circles, “growth” is largely defined as how students progress from test year to test year (Wong, 2017). A “growth” measurement seeks to answer the

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question of “how much” students are learning. In many ways, growth measurements try to compensate for pitfalls in proficiency measurements. For example, if students exhibit The class would still be scoring at a “basic” level nationally; however, a proficiency-focused measurement would not recognize the incredible improvement that district generated. That is not to say such a school district should be looked at as one in which reform is needed; a district where students start off scoring so below national averages is in need of serious policy remedies (although those reforms may be focused outside the school system). On the other hand, a school district that has a significant amount of students testing in the “advanced” range on the 4th grade NAEP, might not exhibit a lot of growth by the time the students get to eighth grade. However, such a school district should probably not be punished in funding formulas for the work they do in early childhood education.

Measuring Student Performance III: Project’s Methods

Clearly, neither a straight-proficiency or straight-growth measurement will provide the most accurate portrait in measuring the schools in our dataset. Recently, however, Dr. Sean Reardon, Professor in the Stanford Graduate School of Education, posed a third method of measuring schools, some of which I will borrow in my measurements. Stanford’s Educational Opportunity Explorer makes use of “learning rates” to measure rates of student improvement between third and eighth grade in standardized testing. Stanford’s dataset converts state-administered standardized testing scores to their NAEP equivalents to measure districts across the country (Reardon, et al, 2019). The goal of these studies is to quantify how much learning is taking place in terms of grade level advancement. For example, if six years of learning take place in a school district between third and eighth grade, the school ought to be

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considered highly effective for producing six years of learning in a five year period. Such a model provides a jumping point for the analyses of schools developed in this chapter.

To measure the success of schools in the dataset, I plan on using two units of measurement. The first unit of measurement used will test for how well schools in the dataset stack up against their peers in terms of average test scores. I will show how schools in the dataset perform against other schools in Kentucky, Central Appalachia, Appalachia as a whole, other schools with geographical similarities, and national averages. Here, I will use the NAEP converted scores, using results from fourth and eighth grade state testing. As previously mentioned, the NAEP is only administered to randomized sets of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders. My data ignores twelfth graders for two related reasons. First, to measure twelfth graders would mean that we would be measuring the point beyond which high schoolers can drop out of school. Additionally, as lower-income school districts, like the ones studied in this project, are susceptible to having higher dropout rates. For the integrity of this project’s findings, studying twelfth grade test scores would serve a limited and skewed purpose.

The second unit of measurement carries structural similarities to the method used by Stanford. However, as the NAEP only measures students in fourth and eighth grade, those grades will be used to measure student improvement and school effectiveness. To calculate rates of academic improvement, I would use the following equation:

$$\textit{Improvement} = 8\textit{th Grade NAEP score in year}_x - 4\textit{th grade NAEP score in year}_{x-4}$$

For example, for students who were 8th graders in 2015 in a given school district would subtract their score in 8th grade from their score in 4th grade in 2011 to calculate the level of improvement. I plan on using these improvement measurements to note school districts in the

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dataset who make up for initial achievement gaps as well as those who fall even farther behind initial shortfalls on standardized tests. Such data will prove critical to evaluating how federal, state, and local bodies of government respond to the needs of disadvantaged schools in Eastern Kentucky.

As a whole, the data will be used to display two several inequalities displayed in the different sets of test results evaluated. First, the fourth grade average score data point will be used to calculate how far behind students begin by the time they would take the NAEP for the first time. This datapoint is more reflective of external, out-of-the-classroom factors that affect student performance. Specifically, this project will closely examine economic inequality, child growth and development, and public health as factors that have more indirect effects on student performance. In examining these variables in our dataset counties, we can gain a clearer picture on the factors that leave students farther ahead or behind by the time they are tested in fourth grade. Through evaluating those three variables at play at the federal, state, and local level of government, we can gain a more complete idea of how these factors play into creating and perpetuating achievement gaps in Eastern Kentucky.

Second, the school improvement totals are incredibly useful at demonstrating how effective schools are at mitigating many of the challenges their students face. Critically, the quality of instruction is not the only reason why some school districts in Eastern Kentucky improve faster than others. Political representation, government assistance, and school funding levels all are critical factors in mitigating the impacts of preexisting inequalities on student achievement in Eastern Kentucky.

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Data & Critical Sources:

In the course of completing this project, I relied on a number of data sources more heavily than others. I have listed below six sources I have relied upon more heavily than others in the conclusions of this work:

- ***The American Community Survey (ACS)***: I frequently will rely on data from the United State Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. The information from the ACS is the most comprehensive source of information for local officials, policymakers, and researchers to analyze year-to-year changes in every community in America.
- ***Kids Count Data Center***: The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center collects data from the Census Bureau, State and Local databases, and other resources that focus on issues facing youth. I relied heavily on this database in examining public health, child development, and economic issues that children face in Chapter Five.
- ***Stanford Educational Data Archive***: For information related to district-level student performance, I relied on data made available from the Stanford Educational Data Archive (SEDA). The SEDA moves to solve the problem that results from the NAEP are usually not available on the district level. The SEDA converts the performance of students on state exams into NAEP equivalent scores, making it possible to evaluate the schools in the dataset. I took the data from SEDA one step further to weigh the scores from each district by their enrollment in fourth and eighth grade to paint a more accurate picture of school performance in this work.
- ***National Center for Education Statistics’ NAEP Data Explorer (NCES)***: The NAEP data explorer provided a number of useful data points used in this work, including the

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performance of national public schools, schools by state, and schools by 4-category geographic status in a state (city, suburb, town, rural), and schools in a 12-category status on a national level (e.g. large city, distant town, remote rural). As the NAEP is given every other year, I used two-year averages from the dataset to complement the NAEP scores.

- ***Kentucky State Board of Elections (KYBOE)***: The Kentucky Secretary of State’s Office provides key information related to voter registration, turnout, and election results from elections dating back to 1982. This data proved incredibly useful in evaluating changes in voter turnout and preferences at the federal, state, and local level on a county-to-county basis.
- ***Robert Wood Johnson County Health Project & Centers for Disease Control***: The Robert Wood Johnson County Health Project (RWJCHP) provides a full ranking of health factors and outcomes facing every county in every state in the country, relying on Census data and state disclosures. Information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) was incredibly useful in adding to the county health data points putting the data in context.

Chapter 4: “How Many Communities?”: Martha Derthick’s Great Question of American Governance

Central to the American founding was the determination of the founders that the United States government would not be a *unitary* system but a *federal* system. In accordance with the spirit of the American revolution, the founders sought to distinguish itself from the unitary governments of Europe, where all powers were vested in the central state apparatus. American political institutions are often characterized by blurred lines of political responsibility.

Historically, as the late federalism scholar Martha Derthick would point out, localism was the predominant choice of pre-20th century America (Derthick, 1999). Up to the progressive era, the United States opted to be a nation of as many local communities as possible. However, from the Progressive Era onward, American institutional development has drifted from local to national (Derthick, 1999).

No area of public policy demonstrates the oscillations of American federalism better than the development of our nation’s public education system. From the founding until 1983, the changing institutional character of America’s public schools mirrored the political institutional development of American institutions as a whole. In this chapter, I will review the development of the American public school through three critical junctures: first, through the Progressive Era at the dawn of the 20th century; second, from the Progressive Era through the end of the Great Society era in 1981; and finally, from 1981 through the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. Interestingly, I will find that although federal power as a whole declined since 1981, the role of the federal government has followed a different trajectory. In recent history, public schools have been treated differently than other tools of public policy.

The Beginnings: Horace Mann to the Turn of the Century

The American founders believed the school to be the best way to keep America’s republican ideals alive through generations. The first student of American democracy, Alexis DeTocqueville, observes in his *Democracy in America* that “in the United States, the sum of men’s education is directed toward politics” (Tocqueville, 1835). The founders believed the school as the method of which to develop good citizens. This idea is reflected in Benjamin Franklin’s saying that our country would be a republic “if we can keep it” (Brockell, 2019). The founders entrusted American schools to maintain mores and republican values. Even before the first public schools were founded, Americans held a belief that the American school should exist as a guardian of the newly formed republic.

While a select amount of private institutions of K-16 education existed in eighteenth and early-nineteenth century America, the public school did not emerge until 1821 when English High School in Boston was founded. Soon after, the City of Boston established the Boston Latin School and the first public elementary school, Mather Elementary, in 1639 (Boston Public Schools, n.d.). The development of the public “common” school truly began to take off in 1837 when Massachusetts established its Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, of which Horace Mann was named its first Secretary. Mann is considered by many to be the father of American public education.

Still, the growth of public schools in America was a slow process that faced multiple setbacks. In his discussions, Tocqueville pointed to the role of the family, especially of the American mother in education and child development (Tocqueville, 1835). In the 1830s, many Americans were opposed to the common school on the grounds that education was the work of

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the family (Mondale and Patton, 2006). One of the first proponents of public education was Thomas Jefferson; though a believer in small government, Jefferson believed public schools to be a vehicle for citizenship. However, his plan for public education in Virginia found itself voted down by the state legislature (Mondale and Patton, 2006). Not even in Massachusetts was the establishment of the common school an easy measure; Horace Mann himself was booted from public office in 1840 with his position abolished (Mondale and Patton, 2006).

Yet, by the 1860s, the question of whether the United States should have public schools was resolved: the answer was a resounding yes. Now, the question of educational development changed. Policymakers began to question what schools should teach and how they should be organized. First, Mann and the pioneers of American public education believed that public schools ought to be teachers of citizenship, mores, and American values. Public schools were being developed during a period of mass immigration to the United States. The founders of America’s schools believed that teaching civics in early grades would aid immigrant children assimilating into the United States (Hirsch, 2009). To a nation rooted in its identity as a place of cultural difference, the schools were the necessary institution from which an American story could be promoted (Hirsch, 2009). The school was the medium within which American citizens could be developed. Tocqueville added that the tendencies of American schools moved to “counteract...imperfections of human nature and to correct the natural defects of democracy” (Tocqueville, 1835). Like the founding fathers envisioned, the schools would be responsible for the maintenance of republican values and the American republic itself. To Mann and the other pioneers of public education, not only should students become proficient in reading and math,

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but they should become proficient American citizens who could assist their fellow men in keeping the republic.

Next, the pioneers of public education moved to structure schools in the American tradition of equal opportunity. Public schools were created to be accessible to every child. They were to be visited by students rich and poor, supported by taxpayer funds, and accessible to all (Hirsch, 2009). The structural organization of America’s early public schools reflected our nation’s political identity and culture. Early public schools grew out of small local communities and were distinguished by the one-room schoolhouse. Despite common assumptions to the contrary, the one-room schoolhouses were remarkably efficient (Fischel, 2009). However, a consequence of mass migration to America was that at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were more public schools than at any other era in American history (NCES, n.d.a.). In this era, the administration of public schools was also more decentralized and localized than any other historical era. Critically, most states had only recently established superintendent of public instruction positions. Furthermore, this foundational era in public education was one without a federal Department of Education. Federal involvement in public education was largely nonexistent, limited to an “Office of Education” housed in the Department of the Interior (Department of Education, 2010; McAndrews 2008). However, the dynamic growth of public schools started to wear down the one-room schoolhouse. Between 1870 to 1890, enrollment spiked 83 percent and school expenditures more than doubled (Mondale and Patton, 2006). Coupled with changes in America’s political dynamics, the public school was an institution ripe for more change and growth.

The Evolution of Expertise: Progressives, The New Deal, and the Great Society

As Martha Derthick points out, American political development embraced localism for over a century after the Constitution’s passage. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, America’s trajectory of political development was turned on its head with the beginnings of the Progressive Era. The next major chapter of American political development - the first progressives and the Great Society - represent a progressive expansion of federal power and progressive decline of local autonomy. This era - from the Presidencies of Teddy Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson - impacted every area of public policy, especially social welfare, regulatory controls, and America’s public schools. As a whole, the Progressive Era reduced local control of public education, much like the Progressive Era did to other areas of public policy. However, the trajectory of public education during this era is truly unique. At its outset, the beginnings of the Progressive Era moved to empower state governments to more strongly supervise their respective local public schools. However, for some Progressives, this was not enough. So, the movement progressed in an even stronger direction, solidifying the role of the federal government in public education with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This section will attempt to explain the developments that led to this evolution in educational administration and explain their consequences.

The School Becomes A Science: The First Progressives

Theodore Roosevelt’s ascension to the Oval Office in 1901 brought the dawn of a new era in American politics: the Progressive Era. The first chapter of the Progressive Era was a broad based reform movement, dedicated to promoting a more equitable economy, protecting American workers, and other associated reforms. A defining characteristic of the entire

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progressive movement was the emphasis the leaders of the movement placed on expertise. The progressives placed great trust in the idea that institutions of government can identify, study, and solve the problems of citizens. The progressives believed that through an assembly of “experts” on an issue of policy, recommendations could be made to pass legislation or create an administrative agency tasked with regulating an area of policy (Landy, 1976).

In regards to education, the Progressives turned to the states to improve the quality of America’s public schools. Specifically, the Progressives used recently established offices and officers - State Departments of Education and State Superintendents of Public Instruction - to enact and enforce regulations, enforce laws, and advance school quality. The enforcement of two laws - child labor and truancy - greatly aided this mission to advance public education (Mondale and Patton, 2001). By forcing states to ban child labor and making school attendance mandatory, public schools endured a numbers boom, one that the Progressives had not fully prepared for. As a consequence of newly filled classrooms, America fully moved away from the common school and into our modern “graded” school system (Fischel, 2009).

At this point where the “grade” was developed, a flurry of bureaucracy, science, and expertise entered the American school system. Instead of a world with one teacher at the town school, we now had “middle-school” math teachers, “third-grade” english teachers, and other specialists. Across the country, many states passed laws and enacted regulations that required teachers to be certified or attend college (Mondale and Patton, 2006). Thus, education became an area of expertise. Chester Finn explained this phenomenon saying that if “you add a library, you need a chief librarian, you start providing lunch, you need somebody in charge of food services...Instead of having just teachers, you suddenly have separate math and science teachers,

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well, then you have to have a department of math teachers, and you have a chairman for math teachers and a supervisor for math teachers” (Mondale and Patton, 2006). While Finn may lament these developments, such a development was in line with the dreams of the first progressives. Colleges then developed their own Schools of Education to train administrators in the “science of school management” (Mondale and Patton, 2006). From superintendents to pupils, the Progressives moved to cement their belief in government power, bureaucracy, and expertise in America’s public schools. Critically, progressives agreed with the goals of the founders of public education and were believers in the importance of civic education. To progressives, the goal was not to change educational curricula but to utilize expertise and create data sets to better administer schools.

Nonetheless, the Progressives still left a large amount of discretion and power to state governments. The early years of the Progressive era in American education was one where federal power still remained hands-off but where the federal government monopolized state power at the expense of local control. Even during the New Deal, the federal government did not begin sending direct federal aid to schools. There still was no Department of Education; federal education experts remained housed in the Department of the Interior. The next steps of federal educational development would wait for the biggest believer in the potential of government to ever hold the Oval Office: Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Enacting the Great Society: Lyndon Johnson and our Schools

Lyndon Johnson’s four predecessors tried to pass school reforms and failed; LBJ had no intention of being the fifth (McAndrews, 2011). After he stepped into the Oval Office, Lyndon Jonson immediately moved to address what he believed to be the unfinished promises of the

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New Deal and the first progressives. To Johnson, a Great Society would not only “demand an end to poverty and racial injustice” but also be “a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and enlarge his talents” (Johnson, 1964). It was, as Johnson noted in another address, to be a society where “no child go unschooled” (Johnson, 1964). The Johnson Administration brought big, structural change to America’s public schools. Interestingly, despite the developments of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society, the Johnson Administration did not fully institutionalize education at the federal level.

To Lyndon Johnson, the American public school was an institution of special endearment. LBJ was not only a product of public schools in Texas but was a public school teacher in his own right (McAndrews, 2011). After his reelection, LBJ made the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act one of his top priorities, telling aides “look we’ve got to do this in a hurry...I want to see this coonskin on the wall” (McAndrews, 2011). In true Lyndon Johnson battering-ram style, the “Master of the Senate” pushed and shoved the Elementary and Secondary Education Act through Congress in a matter of two months. Three key factors contributed to Johnson’s passage of federal educational reform: (1) legislative supermajorities in both houses; (2) Johnson’s knowledge coming from his standing as one of the United State Senate’s greatest students; (3) the connection Johnson made between the need to invest in schools because of the War on Poverty. The combination of the right President at the right time in history generated a monumental change in the power and prerogative of the federal government in public schools.

The ESEA caused a cosmic shift in not only funding levels but also the nature of federal assistance to schools. Before the passage of the ESEA, grants-in-aid were previously awarded for

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school construction (e.g. the Morrill Act and other measures). However, the passage of the ESEA led to federal payouts for “categorical assistance” to schools to assist poor students (McAndrews, 2011). Specifically, Titles I, II and Title III of the ESEA were designed in such a way that children in need would see change in their school districts. Title I sent federal aid to students in need through state education departments. Title II provided for the ability of schools to purchase textbooks. Title III dedicated funds to “supplemental service centers” to provide additional assistance to students at risk (McAndrews, 2011). The passage of ESEA rebalanced the scales of federalism as it relates to schools. While the first Progressives elevated the role of the states and kept the federal government out of direct school oversight, the ESEA moved to insert the federal government into the educational equation in the role of a very generous benefactor. Here, Johnson also shifted the rationale for government involvement in schooling. While previous policy-makers saw the role of government in schools as one where they could promote citizenship, Lyndon Johnson changed the rationale of government involvement in schools to one where investment could reduce poverty.

As the history of Congressional legislation usually goes, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was not a perfect bill when it passed. Like any law, the ESEA would be targeted with amendments and add-ons when it was up for renewal in 1967. However, with the loss of 47 Democratic house seats in 1966, there was concern over if the ESEA would be extended at all (McAndrews, 2011). While the ESEA passed Congress with sweeping support, the results of the ESEA pleased no one in Congress. Progressive members of Congress were frustrated with President Johnson that the ESEA did not go far enough, arguing for a further increase in funding levels. Conservative members of Congress objected to the growth of federal power in education,

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arguing for block grants to devolve many areas of the ESEA to states and localities (McAndrews, 2010). In the end, a compromise emerged and the ESEA won the first of its many congressional reauthorizations.

The legacy of Lyndon Johnson on America’s schools can be viewed in two critical lenses: personalistic and political. First, how Johnson’s reforms were viewed was much like how Johnson was seen in Washington: of equal offense to everyone (McAndrews, 2011). Progressives and unions believed Johnson did not go far enough, arguing “yes, but” to many of his policies. Conservatives, who believed Johnson to be one of the biggest proponents of federal powers to sit behind the Resolute Desk, argued that Johnson eroded centuries of tradition in which the administration of schools was a local matter. American historical tradition tends to analyze presidents personalistically; in this fashion, part of Lyndon Johnson’s legacy in education policymaking bleeds into the more personalistic analyzes of his Presidency.

Second, and more importantly, Lyndon Johnson turned the tables on how much the federal government would chime in on the affairs of public schools. In passing the ESEA, LBJ moved to elevate public schools “to a permanent place at the table of Washington politics and policy” (McAndrews, 2011). What Lyndon Johnson did was end the debate on the question of *if* the federal government should be involved in public education. After the ESEA, the debate question changed to *how much* of a role should be played by Washington in public schools.

One Man’s Pleasure, Other Men’s Pain: Managing the ESEA

Political scientist Martha Derthick once diagnosed the history of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as dominated by “hyperlexis,” or “overactive lawmaking” (Derthick, 2015). Over its history, the ESEA has been reauthorized eight times, with the length

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of Title I in the *U.S. Code* now 30 times as long as it was in 1965 (Derthick, 2015). Much of the back and forth legislating, amendments, and constant changes to the law’s character came in the immediate years after the ESEA was passed. Notably, the administrations of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter all made impacts on the ESEA in its early years, as well as the evolving nature of the federal role in public education. While Lyndon Johnson would be pleased that education remained at the forefront of the administrations that followed him, LBJ would likely be frustrated at the nature of the debates that took place after he retired from the Oval Office. Although Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter all accepted that the federal government would be involved in our nation’s public schools, unfortunately they too often interpreted the question of *how much* as a budget question, not a federalism one.

As President, Richard Nixon was a man of contradictions. Perhaps no policy area symbolized the contradictions of Richard Nixon’s administration than education. Nixon made three promises on educational policy: (1) increasing federal assistance to schools; (2) devolving powers back to the states; (3) increasing the research capabilities of the federal government (McAndrews, 2011). In true Nixon form, America’s thirty-seventh President dug his own grave in the success of his educational policies. First, Nixon attempted to play both sides of the House on education - progressives and unions on one side with conservatives on the other - in terms of school funding levels. While Richard Nixon was happy to point out that the federal expenditures to schools increased under his watch, Nixon habitually vetoed education funding increases when he deemed them too costly (McAndrews, 2011). Nixon was a believer in “cost-quality” in schooling; however, educational experts would argue against him that no such thing exists (McAndrews, 2011).

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Additionally, Nixon’s plans for devolution suffered on two different fronts. On one end, Nixon’s devolutionary experiments cut educational programs still in their early years before their effectiveness could be evaluated (McAndrews, 2011). Nixon also failed to jumpstart his signature “Right to Read” program; it likely did not help that as the program was being debated, Nixon moved to bomb Cambodia (McAndrews, 2011). The failure of “Right to Read” to gain traction was a textbook Nixonian mistake. Nixon’s policies often earned bipartisan acclaim. However, it was Nixon’s extracurricular activities - mouthing off while unknowingly being in earshot of reporters, creating enemies lists, and, of course, Watergate - that helped doom his middle-of-the-road ideas from gaining the bipartisan acclaim one would have expected them to generate.

Finally, on the note of government research, Nixon stymied the Office of Education’s efforts to conduct research by leaving three-quarters of the office vacant over a year-and-a-half into his administration (McAndrews, 2011). While Nixon did extend the ESEA and increase federal support to schools, the contradictions and unforced errors of the Nixon Administration limited Nixon’s educational legacy. Nixon once looked to education as an issue where “Republicans have for the first time in my political career something to be for” (McAndrews, 2011). However, by his own volition, Nixon missed his window to be the Republican Education President. At a time where Nixon had an opportunity to reshape the ESEA, Nixon found his presidency and legacy mired in contradiction and scandal. As a result, the ESEA found itself constantly amended and mauled by Congressional committees without direction and long-term planning from the White House (Derthick, 2015).

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After Richard Nixon’s resignation, the management of Lyndon Johnson’s ESEA fell to one of his former arch-rivals: Gerald Ford. President Ford’s involvement in educational policymaking was limited; a reauthorization of the ESEA was being pushed through Congress on his third day in office (McAndrews, 2011). While Ford’s signing of the reauthorization initially put him in the good graces of the AFT and NEA in 1974, vetoing the following education appropriation earned him significant opposition and contributed to Jimmy Carter’s 1976 union support. Like Nixon before him, Ford favored block grants to devolve power back to the states. Yet, Ford’s signature piece of educational legislation, the Financial Assistance for Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1976, which would merge twenty-seven programs into a single block grant, found itself dead on arrival in Congress (McAndrews, 2011). Outside of policy failures and signing ESEA reauthorizations, Ford largely left the shaping of education policy and the ESEA to the Congress. The then President of the AFT, Carl Megel once argued that Ford “viewed education as the extra guest at the dinner table,” where in the era of stagflation there just was not enough room for investment (McAndrews, 2011). Such an attitude ensured Ford would not be remembered as an education President.

For educational reformers and teachers unions, the election of Jimmy Carter was seen as a breath of fresh air. Carter, a longtime school board member in Georgia who served on the Education Committee as a State Senator, brought genuine interest and initiative in creating education policy (McAndrews, 2011). During his campaign, Carter was the first Presidential candidate to win the support of the AFT and the NEA. Heavily factored in the endorsement was Carter's promise to permanently cement the federal government’s role in education by creating a cabinet-level Department of Education (McAndrews, 2011).

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To Jimmy Carter, the battle over the creation of a Department of Education did not come from a drive to increase the role of the government in public schools. Rather, it came out of a desire for efficiency, to centralize education programs scattered across the executive branch into one program (McAndrews, 2011). Like Nixon and Ford before him, Carter attempted to mix cost and quality in American public education. Through selling the elements of fiscal conservatism inherent in the creation of a Department of Education, Carter was successful in assembling a bipartisan coalition to gain Congress’ approval to create the department.

Beyond the creation of the Department of Education, Carter’s legacy on public schools did not go exactly as he planned. While Carter did increase federal spending levels and finally institutionalize education at the federal level, Carter still did not achieve all of what he hoped for. At the beginning of his term, Carter promised to attack educational reform more from a matter of policy than politics. However, Carter tied himself down in political concerns, once again fighting his battles on spending levels rather than developing long-term strategic plans for the role of the federal government or moving to truly streamline and define the federal government’s role in education. By the end of his administration, Carter began to view his success in shaping education policy based off of the funding increases he won instead of his role in shaping the tenor of the ESEA (McAndrews, 2011). Once again, like Ford and Nixon before him, Carter’s tendency to get bogged down in the fiscal details often left the textual details of the ESEA to the Congress.

After the strong Presidency of Lyndon Johnson on education, Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter all failed to truly make their stamp on education policy in the long-term. While federal funds to schools skyrocketed over all of their administrations, funds proved to be the only

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defining victory of each administration. All three Presidents largely ceded the amending and shaping of education policy to Congress, specifically the House Education and Works Committee (McAndrews, 2011). The House of Representatives is the branch of government subject to the most turnover, power shifts, and new ideas - such a result ought to be expected when its members change every two years. Yet, the power in which the House held over the ESEA definitely contributed to the consistent mutability of the ESEA over time (Derthick, 2015). The failure of the executives of this era to assert a direction for the federal role in education policy left a hole for an overlegislating Congress that changed directions habitually (Derthick, 2015). While Lyndon Johnson hoped federal involvement in education would crack a dent in child poverty rates, the administrations that followed him did not ask the educational questions that he had hoped for.

Turning It Back?: Public Education in the Devolution Revolution, 1981-2001

Despite hopes that the federal role in schools had been successfully institutionalized during the Carter years, proponents of a big federal role in public schools were surely nervous with the election of Ronald Reagan. During his campaign, Ronald Reagan promised to abolish the Department of Education, cut expenditures, and get the federal government out of the business of supervising public schools (McAndrews, 2011). In retrospect, Reagan did not accomplish a single one of his initial campaign goals for education. On the contrary, Reagan did more than his three predecessors combined to assure that the federal government would have a say in America’s public schools. As President, Reagan ended up increasing education spending and gave the Department of Education a meaningful seat at the policymaking table. However,

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Reagan’s warming up to the role of public schools was more driven by outside historical circumstances than it was by personal progressive belief.

In the early years of his administration, Reagan did stay true to his campaign promise not to be an education President. During the first two budget cycles after his inauguration, Reagan proposed a total of \$6.5 billion in budget reductions to education (McAndrews, 2011). Reagan also attempted to make good on his promise to abolish the Department of Education at the cabinet-level. However, after months of lobbying, Reagan failed to attain requisite Congressional support. One whip count of the Senate had only nineteen senators in favor of abolishing the Department, with eighty-one against (McAndrews, 2011). Key to Reagan’s failure was President Carter’s drive to centralize educational resources and make government more efficient, an idea which gained consistent Republican support. Still, in his early years, Reagan sought to cut budgets, limit the scope of the Department, and ran afoul of powerful teachers unions. However, in 1983, the policies of the Reagan administration shifted seismically.

In 1983, President Reagan’s Education Secretary T.H. Bell formed a group known as the National Commission on Educational Excellence (McAndrews, 2011). The goal of the commission was to publish a report on the successes and failures of American schools, coupled with policy solutions that legislators could implement. The commission’s report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, produced a true change in educational perspective for the Reagan administration. The report began with the words “our nation is at risk” writing that “if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we may well have viewed it as an act of war” (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). The commission argued that “our society and its educational institutions

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seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling” (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). The publication of the report generated the most sustained drive for school reform in our nation’s history. The sensationalism over *A Nation at Risk* forced Ronald Reagan to change his tone on school policy. Following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, Reagan moved to increase the budget for education every single year he remained in office (McAndrews, 2011). In the eighteen months that followed the report’s release, Reagan made fifty-one speeches on education. Reagan moved to accept the findings of *A Nation at Risk*, including the areas in which the federal government was asked to take on a bigger role in the management of schools. *A Nation at Risk* led to education policy and funding the exception to the devolutionary trends that have governed politics since the Great Society.

Still, like the Presidents before him, Reagan’s record on schools was not without controversy. Politically, it made sense for Reagan to fight for school reforms, especially when his 1984 opponent Walter Mondale ushered the creation of the Department of Education through the Senate (McAndrews, 2011). Polling data also demonstrated that Reagan needed to grow in his handling of education policy (McAndrews, 2011). While Reagan’s shifts in opinion may have been opportunistic, the fact that they occurred after *A Nation at Risk* was published demonstrates the importance of the report and how it even changed the opinions of an avid opponent of federal involvement in schools. Still, Reagan left many of the fine print details over ESEA reauthorizations and reforms to the Congress. As a result, the tradition of Presidents who allowed the Congress to quickly shift school policy continued.

However, Reagan’s Presidency was critical for shaping the next few decades for federal administration of public schools. After *A Nation at Risk*, Reagan changed his stance from

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across-the-board budget cuts to budget cuts in every area except for education (McAndrews, 2010). Under Reagan, the bureaucracy and power of the Department for Education grew. Most critically, in an era where politicians promised to devolve power back to the states, Reagan strengthened the role of the federal government in public education. Reagan’s administration set a precedent for subsequent administrations that saw the role of government in public education as more solution than problem.

George H.W. Bush’s succession of Reagan brought continuity in education policy. Through his administration, Bush focused his energy on foreign policy, namely in managing the international order during the collapse of the Soviet Union. Areas of domestic policy, including education, were areas where Bush largely moved to maintain the status quo (McAndrews, 2011). Although Bush did not fight hard to advance a large program of school reform during his Presidency, Bush made one critical contribution to education policy. Bush’s contribution came out of his four-word set of beliefs on how America’s schools should be administered: “excellence, choice, accountability, need” (McAndrews, 2011). Then Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch argues that the Bush era in education brought forward a belief that school choice would produce better educational results and lead to the promotion of higher standards in standard public schools (Ravitch, 2011). The elder Bush was the first of several subsequent Presidents to turn a drive for fiscal accountability, which dated back to the Nixon Administration into a push for national standards through testing outcomes (McAndrews, 2011). Bush helped turn the tables in debates over school funding from the poverty calculus advanced by Lyndon Johnson into a competition calculus that dominates the debates of today.

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President Clinton continued to expand the federal role in education, much in accordance with his predecessors. Even though programs such as welfare were devolved to the states during the Clinton administration, the federal government continued to grow more active in managing schools (McAndrews, 2011). Clinton’s more progressive education reforms - including his plan to change Title I’s funding formula - did not play well with Republicans in Congress. However, Clinton did continue to grow the standards revolution in American public education. Clinton’s Goals 2000 plan, which was mostly scuttled by Congress, moved to attempt to set voluntary national standards for schools (McAndrews, 2011). Later in his administration, Clinton was successful in mandating teachers’ passage of performance exams in their subject area as a condition of aid, giving an accountability measure the same power as that of Civil Rights standards (McAndrews, 2011). In this era of devolution (or at least attempted devolution) in American politics between 1981 and 2001, education was the area which the devolution revolution passed over. In fact, the role of the federal government in education grew. While the Clinton years did not produce anything earth-shattering in education reform, they moved to set the table for the test-dominated accountability revolution that would follow under Presidents Bush and Obama.

“Childrens Do Learn When Standards Are High and Results Are Measured”: NCLB, ESSA, and the Era of High-Stakes Testing, 2001-2015

“Rarely is the question asked: is our children learning?” opined America’s forty-third President George W. Bush. After installing test-rooted, accountability-based education reform in Texas, Bush sought to take his reforms nationwide after he captured the White House. Bush presided over a period where educational reform altered from being a “standards-based”

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movement to an “accountability-based” movement (Ravitch, 2011). While standards focus on what children are learning, accountability focuses on how children are performing relative to such standards on tests. Bush’s push for accountability-based reforms culminated in 2002, with the passage of the landmark No Child Left Behind reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. From a political development lens, several key outcomes emerged out of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). First, the role of the federal government in public education continued to grow stronger. Second, the standards revolution found itself hijacked by an accountability based revolution. Finally, introducing choice into the school equation at the federal level shifted the political calculus towards education once more.

In his run for office, George W. Bush took on the label of a “compassionate conservative,” meaning he believed just as much in literacy standards as he did tax cuts (Deckman, 2014). Unlike other conservatives, Bush had no fear of increasing the power of the federal government as a consequence of accomplishing his policy agenda. No Child Left Behind continued to transform the complex role that the federal government plays in public education. The results of NCLB from the perspective of federal power are remarkable. While NCLB allowed states to set their own standards and write their own tests, it mandated yearly standardized testing for every third through eighth grader. Furthermore, the sanctions regime that came with NCLB provided the federal government with more sticks than ever to govern public schools. If a school failed to meet “adequate yearly progress,” a school district may, on an earlier offense, have to use federal funds to bus students to “successful” neighboring schools or provide free tutoring for students of low socioeconomic status (Ravitch, 2011). Should the struggles continue, a school may be forced to make staff changes, extend the school year, or become a

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charter school (Ravitch, 2011). While students rarely took advantage of the rights to transfer districts or the right to free tutoring, the fact these guidelines were in place shows an incredible expansion of federal powers over public schools (Ravitch, 2011).

Previously, President Clinton failed to implement national curricular and testing standards with his Goals 2000 reform package. Clinton’s standards effort failed almost as soon as his administration’s history standards were released. The standards were withdrawn after heavy criticism by conservatives, led by Lynne Cheney, for making too much mention of Joe McCarthy and slavery and not doing enough to celebrate America’s triumphs (Ravitch, 2011). Clinton attempted to encourage states to take the lead in crafting thorough, specific standards to boost learning outcomes (McAndrews, 2011; Ravitch, 2011). However, the results were not what Clinton hoped; English standards emerged without any recommended texts for students to read and History standards were crafted without any mention of a single historical date or event for students to know (Ravitch, 2011). Politicians had no appetite for producing thorough national standards; however, they were able to come together on developing measures of accountability. Politically, this makes sense; in *Words that Work*, Frank Luntz describes how “accountability” is one of the American public’s favorite words (Luntz, 2015). A politician who argues that “we need to hold schools accountable for making sure every child can read” at a campaign rally will likely be met with instantaneous applause. The promise of accountability in schools brought Republicans and Democrats in both houses of Congress together to pass NCLB with veto-proof majorities. NCLB continued the practice of leaving standards entirely up to the states while installing a test-based, funding-tied accountability regime in public schools.

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The Congressional architects of No Child Left Behind sought two goals: a system where standards were higher *and* where all students would be proficient at their grade levels by the 2013-2014 school year (LeFloch, et al. 2007). However, instead of encouraging schools to meet the national proficiency standards, NCLB allowed states to devise their own standards. In doing so, NCLB encouraged what some called a “race to the bottom,” where in order to show adequate yearly progress, states would decrease the proficiency benchmarks to hold onto federal funds. As a result, critics argued that while NCLB meant to bring forth higher standards and greater accountability, what NCLB accomplished was lower standards and accountability as a talking point at a stump speech rather than a tool for growth.

Furthermore, the development of a testing-based regime was another politically-rooted change to the American educational curriculum that came from a changing calculus from how Washington viewed public schools. Lyndon Johnson’s calculus for leading the first major federal intervention in public education was the assistance of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. Beginning with George H.W. Bush was a competitive calculus, rooted in the United States being outtested by other developed nations in standardized tests. Instead of intervening in schools to assist marginalized youth, Bush’s NCLB reforms were rooted in a desire to make America’s schools more competitive with that of the rest of the world.

Finally, the passage of No Child Left Behind introduced the element of school choice into the purview of the United States federal government. At least in the 2000s, charter schools were institutions of bipartisan appeal. On one hand, Democrats saw charter schools as a medium through which they could reinvent government. On the other hand, Republicans believed the development of charter schools would drive down the numbers and strength of teachers unions

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(Ravitch, 2011). NCLB’s inclusion of busing measures for students in floundering schools and sanctions that could lead to a public school becoming a charter was revolutionary. Here, the federal government opened the door for further measures down the line where more federal funds could be diverted from public schools to privately operated ones.

A Shotgun Wedding: Barack Obama and Arne Duncan’s Management of NCLB & Common Core, 2009-2015

President Obama ran for office dissatisfied with the consequences of No Child Left Behind. In 2011, school administrators and policymakers around the country determined that 100 percent proficiency by 2014 was not possible, even with reduced state proficiency standards (Saultz, Fusarelli, and McEachin, 2015). While No Child Left Behind largely abandoned the standards movement in exchange for an accountability one, President Obama favored a mix of both methods of reform. Critical to understanding Obama’s actions are the economic conditions under which he took office. As a part of the economic stimulus package, the Obama Administration developed the Race to the Top (RTTT) program, which provided incentives to states to strengthen teacher evaluations and content standards in exchange for more federal support (Saultz, Fusarelli, and McEachin, 2015). The RTTT initiative represented another increase in the role of the federal government in schools. Here, the Obama Administration took NCLB a step further, in this case, mandating higher standards NCLB hoped to encourage in exchange for more federal funding. However, the Obama Administration saw other areas in which it could reform schools, correct NCLB, and in doing so, further heighten the role of the federal government in education.

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At first, the Obama Administration’s suggested RTTT reform package was not universally adopted. Consequently, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan presented a compromise to state educational leaders: the federal government will waive large swaths of No Child Left Behind in exchange for the adaptation of federally-mandated Common Core standards. States were more than happy to escape NCLB’s untenable proficiency requirement; however, the mandate of Common Core was not well received by the states. Political scientist Frederick Hess correctly describes Common Core’s opposition as more about methods of implementation than the details of the standards themselves (Hess, 2014). The opposition to Common Core was truly bipartisan; its opponents included Diane Ravitch, teachers unions, Lamar Alexander, the Tea Party, principals, district superintendents, and state leaders (Hess, 2014; Saultz, Fusarelli, and McEachin, 2017).

At the implementation of Common Core, the federal government’s power in schools was the highest it had ever been. Early public schools were originally treated as a solely local matter. Then, the early Progressives utilized state government as the vehicle to exert more control over education. Eventually, President Johnson moved to elevate the role of the federal government to the point where direct federal aid would be given to school districts. It was not until the second President Bush’s Administration where the federal government would move to tie the operations of a public school to its performance on standardized testing. President Obama and Arne Duncan’s waiver regime that absolved the requirements of NCLB in exchange for adopting the Common Core pushed the power of the federal government over public schools to new heights. Yet, after decades where federal power in public education grew, force of devolution and opposition finally began to answer back.

Back To Basics: A Federal Mea Culpa & the Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015-Present

By 2015, an array of political forces from teachers unions, lawmakers, school administrators, and conservative activists emerged to protest the Common Core standards. Seeing the opposition of key constituency groups to NCLB, RTTT, and Common Core, President Obama and Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), once Secretary of Education in the first Bush Administration, began to work a compromise to reauthorize the ESEA so that NCLB would be replaced (Saultz, Fusarelli, and McEachin, 2017). The compromise between Obama and Alexander emerged in the form of The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). The ESSA reversed the trajectory of increasing federal involvement in schools following the passage of the ESEA a half-century before. The ESEA moved to delegate the nature of accountability systems and the development of teacher accountability systems (Saultz, Fusarelli, and McEachin, 2017). At this point in time, both the implementation of the ESSA and the policies of the Trump Administration are too recent to provide further commentary and judgement. However, both the ESSA’s implementation and Trump Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos are likely to continue the reversal in policy directions where states and localities play a bigger role in shaping education policy.

Chapter 5: “This Land Is Home to Me”: The Political Development and Cultures of Eastern Kentucky

In 1975, the Catholic Committee of Appalachia released a pastoral letter that discussed a range of issues facing Appalachia. Topics in the letter ranged from mine safety to the quality of schools. The goal of the letter was to proclaim the message inherent in the letter’s title: “This Land is Home to Me” (Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 1975). In 1995 and 2015, the Committee released two more pastorals, respectively titled “At Home in the Web of Life” and “The Telling Takes Us Home” (Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 1995 and 2015). All the titles of all three letters share a common word: “home.” As the letters indicate, few places in the United States carry as strong of an attachment to home than Appalachia, with Eastern Kentucky being a part of that tradition. Political scientist Marc Landy stresses that “understanding the distinctive character of Kentucky politics begins with appreciating the importance of this strong attachment to place and of the deep ties and sense of caring it creates” (Landy, 1984). Eastern Kentucky, to so many, truly is the “home which one never truly leaves” (Landy, 1984).

Simply put, political culture illuminates the habits of the heart. In order to understand the political system that leaves Eastern Kentucky’s schools behind, the political culture of Eastern Kentucky must first be illustrated. Eastern Kentucky’s political history is unique. The political story of Eastern Kentucky does not read like the joyous tone of a Hallmark card or a Lifetime movie. Nonetheless, the attachment so many hold towards their old Kentucky home is more than enough to clog every road into Kentucky with endless traffic on a Friday afternoon in the summer (Landy, 1984). This chapter will seek to explore both the highs and lows during Eastern Kentucky’s political development. The foundations of Eastern Kentucky’s political culture begin

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with its settlement and continue to evolve today. In this chapter, I will be addressing Kentucky’s settlement, the growth and decline of extractive industries, and the unique variety of rural consciousness present in Eastern Kentucky to provide a full picture of Eastern Kentucky’s ups and downs.

“Others...Ran Away to the Interior”: Settlement & Cultural Foundations

The natural American belief is to think of our founding fathers as pious, Puritans who came to America to enjoy free exercise of their religion. However, such explanations only suffice for no more than a handful of American states; Kentucky is not one of them. When plantations grew in the Colonial South, newly wealthy landowners needed labor for their estates. Although the slave trade eventually dominated the labor force, plantation owners were also dependent on indentured servitude. England was exceedingly happy to empty its orphanages, jails, and debtors prisons to the needs of plantation owners in the new world (Caudill, 1962). In the years before the American revolution, just shy of 50,000 convicts and 200,000 indentured servants immigrated to the United States to serve time on the plantations to earn their freedom in America (Fogelman, 1998). Once their terms concluded, some indentured servants became plantation owners in their own right. The rest of the indentured servants, as Henry Louis Caudill points out, “ran away to the interior, to the rolling Piedmont, and thence to the dark foothills on the fringes of the Blue Ridge” (Caudill, 1962). Simply put, we need to dispel with any naive notion that East Kentucky was founded by wealthy pilgrims who lived their lives in gentle service to their God. East Kentucky was founded by penniless orphans and ex-convicts who embraced their status as America’s first “mountaineers” (Caudill, 1962). As Caudill explains, the first inhabitants of East Kentucky “moved over a few hundred miles to find unplowed creek bottoms, a more plentiful

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supply of game, and to get away from his neighbors” (Caudill, 1962). The Kentucky mountaineer mentality was not born in the hills of East Kentucky; rather, it was a well established, cross-continental culture which traveled from British orphanages, through Virginia plantations, and then to the hills of Appalachia. However, the birth of the mountaineer culture in Appalachia largely gave birth to the American notion of rugged individualism.

Since its founding, the people of Appalachia have been a people of stories. Few people share such a collective memory and identity as the people of Eastern Kentucky. Three key stories formed the shared history central to the development of Appalachia’s early political culture: the era before the Civil War, the time era after the War to 1972, and 1972 to the present. The first generation of people born in East Kentucky grew up with stories of their parent’s travels to the frontier as their origin story (Caudill, 1962). The first children of the Kentucky hills were raised to have an unbelievable grit (Caudill, 1962).

The Civil War brought the next chapter of Kentucky’s political-cultural development. In Kentucky, every household was seemingly involved in the Civil War; roughly 100,000 fought for the Union with 40,000 for the Confederacy (Lipshetz, 2017). Such a tradition continued through the Civil War, from which a telling of “war tales” became a firm part of Eastern Kentucky’s tradition (Caudill, 1962). After the American Civil War came “the Wars,” where generations of family rivalries grew violent (Caudill, 1962). Kentucky’s small wars helped incite a suspicion of the neighbor that was only overcome thanks to the arrival of exploitative, out-of-state coal executives in the 20th century.

Also critical to Kentucky’s beginnings was the slow organization of public services. It took over seventy-five years after Kentucky’s founding for the first public schools to be

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organized (Caudill, 1962). I would argue that Kentucky’s first students were victims of a two century achievement gap, dating back to orphanages and debtors prisons in seventeenth century Great Britain (Caudill, 1962). At one point, Kentucky’s public sector was the second most disorganized in the United States, only behind Arkansas (Caudill, 1962). However, the national nature of the Civil War forced many Kentucky frontiersmen to leave his hills for the first time. Veterans returning from war with a more national understanding helped expedite the growth of Kentucky’s administrative state (Caudill, 1962).

The Growth of Industry: Timber, Coal, and Exploitation, Civil War to the Great Society

While the term “resource curse” is a newer term in the political science literature, the struggles of areas with great resource wealth has been observed and denoted for centuries. In 1711, the British newspaper *Spectator* noted that “in countries of the greatest plenty, there is the poorest living” (Addison 2017). Eastern Kentucky, and all of Appalachia, has been no stranger to this “resource curse.” Despite sitting on top of the nation’s most plentiful coal reserves, six of the ten toughest places to live in the United States are in East Kentucky’s coalfield counties (Flippen, 2014). This section will explore the early days of extractive industries in Kentucky, specifically the beginnings of the out-of-state sponsored lumber industry, the growth of the coal industry, and the successful formation of the United Mine Workers of America union.

The origins of resource extraction from Eastern Kentucky did not begin with coal; rather, the removal of natural resources from Appalachia began with the logging industry. Since the late 1870s, timber has been a touch and go industry in Eastern Kentucky. Corporate executives in New York, Philadelphia, or Cincinnati found the joint excesses of timber and cheap labor in Eastern Kentucky ripe for their picking (Caudill, 1962). Before the development of the coal

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industry, logging “provided nearly all the region’s money,” but “left in wake legions of maimed men, widows, and orphans” (Caudill, 1962). Critically, the late nineteenth century was long before the days of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the National Labor Relations Act, and workman’s comp. Logging executives across state lines moved to exploit Appalachians for *their* natural resources, a trend that continued with the arrival of coal operators in the coming decades. While the coal executives were Appalachia’s greatest exploiters of resource wealth, it bears importance that such practices began even before the coal companies arrived in Eastern Kentucky.

In the introduction of *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, Caudill wrote that, in Eastern Kentucky, “much of this region’s story is the story of coal. Coal has always cursed the land in which it lies...to its sad blend, history has added the curse of coal as a crown of sorrow” (Caudill, 1962). Caudill’s introduction, first published in 1962, would be just as accurate if the text were first published in 2020, if not even more accurate. Nearly as soon as coal was found in the hills of Eastern Kentucky, out-of-state corporations immediately began to exploit the landowners, residents, and labor of the region. As Caudill once wrote on extractive behavior that “if timber brought [the mountaineer] a small financial award, his minerals were basically given away” (Caudill, 1962).

From the end of the Civil War through the era of the Great Society, the mining sector in Eastern Kentucky consistently grew. Between the Civil War and 1900, coal production in Eastern Kentucky tripled; then, between 1900 and 1930, production increased fivefold (Hansell, 2018). Despite the periods of rapid unionization that took root after 1920, coal companies still held the upper hand. For example, by 1910, over 85% of mineral rights in Appalachia were owned by

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non-residents of the area (Hansell, 2018). Starting in the 1870s, the coal mining business also began to consolidate monopoly style (Hennen, 2008). Small, family-run mines were bought out by corporations from out of state who acted with less regard for local workers and local needs. Coal mining employment peaked at the end of this period, with 150,000 Appalachians working in the mines in 1950 (Hansell, 2018). From the arrival of coal operators at the turn of the century through the legitimization of the UMWA in Eastern Kentucky during the 1930s, three defining exploitative practices dominated this era of coal mining: broad-form deeds, strings-attached work-life stability, and union busting. While the power of the UMWA did limit these practices, the lasting damage of the coal industry’s exploitative practices shaped Eastern Kentucky’s skepticism of outsiders and helped form the region’s rural consciousness.

The first key exploitative practice conducted by coal industries came from a practice known as the “broad form deed” (Landy, 1976). Soon after the mines in Eastern Kentucky opened, mining company representatives would travel from house to house to convince property owners to sign away their land rights to the company for fractions of their property’s actual worth (Landy, 1976; Caudill, 1962). The “broad form deed” allowed coal companies the “free right of ingress, degree, and regress in, on, to, over, upon, under, and through said land” (Landy, 1976). While most literate readers would understand that such an agreement gave the mining company the chance to drill under your kitchen sink should there be a quarter-ounce of coal stuck under it, Caudill points out that “hardly twenty-five percent of mineral deeds were signed by grantors who could so much as scrawl their names” (Caudill, 1976). It took until the 1960s for residents of many of the counties in this project’s data sample (Perry, Knott, Letcher, and others) to discover that their ancestors granted the coal company the right to tear through their backyard

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rose gardens and family cemeteries (Landy, 1976). Residents of our dataset counties had their properties maimed, destroyed, or stolen by coal executives (Caudill, 1962).

Additionally, coal companies ravaged Eastern Kentucky by creating what I term “strings-attached” work-life stability. By this, I argue that coal companies tied together miners being able to have a job to feed their family with being able to have a home in a uniquely manipulative fashion. The great benefit of mining coal in the early twentieth century in Eastern Kentucky was the coal companies would provide a roof for miners and their families to live under in exchange for their labors (Hansell, 2018). However, should a coal miner lose their job in the mines, whether it be as a result of workplace or injury or union-forming activities, they would also lose their home (Hansell, 2018). Mining companies not only forced the first coal miners of Eastern Kentucky to sell away their property rights but they also tied their future housing directly to their employment. There was neither an OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Act) or an NLRA (National Labor Relations Act) in 1910 so that when a miner went “under the hill,” his family would be out of luck (Caudill, 1962).

Finally, the early mining companies sought to do everything in their power to stop coal miners from being able to form labor unions. To coal executives, mandated negotiations with coal miners concerning wages, hours, and working conditions was their worst nightmare. Coal companies took direct, overt actions to stop union organizing, such as firing miners for union-forming activities. Coal operators also used more subtle techniques, including their hiring of more black miners with the hope of exploiting national racial strife to divide miners on the ground from forming a local union (Hansell, 2018). White and black mining families were placed in separate neighborhoods as an attempt to enhance racial divisions in the mines (Hansell,

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2018). Coal companies sought to control every aspect of life in Eastern Kentucky, not only attempting to control the organizing ability of their employees but also to control the operations of the local school district (Caudill, 1962). As this project shifts back to the role of schools in Chapters Five, it bears great importance to consider the role the coal industry had in designing and administering schools in Eastern Kentucky. Still, the combination of broad-form deeds, strings-attached work-life stability, and union busting efforts provided the coal companies with an upper hand that miners and the UMWA would never be able to truly regain.

While Appalachia is often known for its cultural conservatism, it is a region home to some of the most prolific union organizing efforts and labor activism in American history. The gritty, mountaineer foundations of the Kentucky coal miner have great influence on these stories of activism, where miners moved to fight back against the coal companies bleeding them dry. Once their profit margins grew tight in the late 1910s and early 1920s, coal companies viewed keeping wages down as the best way to keep their budgets balanced (Hennen, 2008). While coal miners in other states were able to gain support from the UMWA for their strikes, miners in West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky struggled to successfully organize to form labor unions (Hennen, 2008). The Great Depression was of no help to Eastern Kentucky miners’ pay prospects; nonetheless, the nationwide economic downturn only added fuel to the miner’s fury at mine bosses as the strings-attached economic stability regime showed its negative effects when miners became victims of “company evictions” (Hennen, 2008). In 1931, over 11,000 coal miners in Harlan and Bell Counties (both in the dataset) joined the UMWA, with 5,800 of those miners also striking. Tragically, most histories of Eastern Kentucky that focus on the “Bloody Harlan” narrative characterize the strikers as barbaric ancestors of the Hatfields and the McCoys rather

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than as ingenuitive and brave fighters for worker’s rights (Catte, 2018). The effects of the strikes in Harlan and Bell were felt up and down the Appalachian coalfields; at the end of 1933, the Appalachian Agreements provided almost every miner in Eastern Kentucky with the power of the UMWA to negotiate with their coal operators over wages, hours, and working conditions on their behalf (Hennen, 2008). Miners in 1930s’ Kentucky were far more progressive than history books often credit; revealingly, the Federal Writers Project study of Kentucky moved to conceal much of Kentucky’s more radical labor history and progressive movements (Catte, 2018).

Also absent from many “Trump Country” tales of Eastern Kentucky is the rich diversity that the region enjoyed during this time period. In the 1920s, mine towns in Eastern Kentucky were often referred to as “little New Yorks” (Hansell, 2018). The mines of the region were filled by workers black and white, by immigrants and ancestors of the first frontiersmen (Hansell, 2018). Over twenty percent of coal miners during this time period were black (Catte, 2018). While there is no disputing Appalachia’s modern cultural conservatism, narratives of the region consistently omit the progressivism of mine organizers and legitimate diversity enjoyed by the region in order to form a convenient and simplistic but incorrect story about the history and culture of Eastern Kentucky.

The Great Society, Narratives of Reform, and the Foundations for Resentment:

“We are going to assemble the best...to find those answers for America...we will begin to set our course toward the Great Society,” bellowed the thirty-sixth President of the United States at a commencement speech in 1964 (Johnson, 1964). Lyndon Johnson declared his goal of a “Great Society” days after declaring a “war on poverty in all its forms” while standing on the porch steps of the Fletcher family cabin in Inez, a small town in Martin County, Kentucky

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(Hampson, 2014). Since 1960, blue-collar workers, especially Kentucky coal miners, have been the recipients of major socioeconomic changes. I use the passive to describe the seismic changes areas such as Eastern Kentucky have faced with regards to the labor market, schools, the economy, and the family because many of these changes were made without regard for the agency of those affected. This section will address three key moments of political change Eastern Kentucky faced: the reforms of the Great Society, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, and regulations pursued by the Environmental Protection Administration. While the national intent of all three reforms was to improve the quality of life across the country, the results of these reforms in Eastern Kentucky only sowed more seeds of political resentment and rural consciousness. Rather than judging the efficacy of the Great Society, OSHA, and EPA regulations, my focus on this section is the effects these policy reforms had on shaping hearts and minds in Eastern Kentucky. This is not done to omit successes or failures of these policies but rather to focus our attention on the foundations of the present politics of resentment in the region.

The greatest indictment of the Great Society’s implementation in Appalachia was not its results but the problematic narrative within which the Great Society was framed. On one hand, many social scientists credit the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965 for reducing poverty rates in Central Appalachia from 58 percent in 1960 to 23 percent in 2010 (Ziliak, 2012). President Lyndon Johnson, the architect of that legislation, truly did care about reducing poverty in Appalachia and rural America in general. On New Year’s Day 1964, Johnson proclaimed that it was time to “bring rural America into the mainstream of American prosperity” (Bowler, 1985). Though well intentioned, Johnson’s encouragement to the press to focus on the plight of Appalachians encouraged a tragic poverty tourism by journalists who explained Appalachians

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through a single, one-size-fits-all narrative which described Appalachians as “backwards,” living in shacks, and without dignity (Bowler, 1985). While these stories of helplessness did raise popular support for Lyndon Johnson’s anti-poverty programs, they created a political culture of resentment and rural consciousness which only grew in subsequent decades.

Almost every article in the social science literature regarding the Great Society in Appalachia goes to detail the effects of Caudill’s *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s on the wider American media (Ziliak, 2012; Bowler, 1985; Catte, 2018; Vance, 2016; Hansell, 2008). For the entire first half of *Cumberland*s, Caudill focuses his ire on the conglomerate of mine operators, East coast businessmen, and corrupt politicians who robbed Eastern Kentucky of its natural resource wealth. However, that chapter of Appalachia’s story is largely absent from the dispatches from the journalistic poverty tours of Eastern Kentucky. Appalachia scholar Elizabeth Catte points out that any examination of media stories about Appalachia would find that “dependency narratives fuel talking points” (Catte, 2018). The press easily pointed out and empirically proved that people in Central Appalachia were living in poverty. However, these stories never focused on the question of *why* are people in Central Appalachia poor. These false stories about Appalachia failed to preface their detailing of poverty with the abuses of politicians, businessmen, and elites that helped make them poor. Instead of starting their stories of Appalachia documenting the abuses of mine operators, these stories of Appalachia opted to describe Appalachians as “backwards,” as if they were broken and needed to be fixed.

The Appalachia Regional Development Act of 1965 brought forth historic levels of federal aid to the region. However, residents of Eastern Kentucky did not feel that the initial arrival of federal assistance was followed by more federal funds; rather, they believed it was

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followed by an era of rules and regulations, both good and bad. In 1969, Congress passed the Coal Mine Safety and Health Act which mandated four safety inspections a year for underground mines (Breslin, 2010). The Act also provided compensation for miners who suffered from black lung disease. Subsequently, the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970 provided more funds for inspectors to evaluate mine safety. In 1973, the movement for mine safety continued with the formation of the Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration (MESA), which later became the Miner Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) in 1979 (Breslin, 2010). The implementation of these regulations led to a consistent reduction in mining deaths that has continued through today, as noted in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Nationwide Mining Deaths, 1900 through 2018 (MSHA, 2019.)

Please Note:

Office workers included starting in 1973.

Year	Miners	Fatalities	Year	Miners	Fatalities	Year	Miners	Fatalities	Year	Miners	Fatalities
1900	448,581	1,489	1930	644,006	2,063	1960	189,679	325	1990	168,625	66
1901	485,544	1,574	1931	589,705	1,463	1961	167,568	294	1991	158,677	61
1902	518,197	1,724	1932	527,623	1,207	1962	161,286	289	1992	153,128	55
1903	566,260	1,926	1933	523,182	1,064	1963	157,126	284	1993	141,183	47
1904	593,693	1,995	1934	566,426	1,226	1964	150,761	242	1994	143,645	45
1905	626,045	2,232	1935	565,202	1,242	1965	148,734	259	1995	132,111	47
1906	640,780	2,138	1936	584,582	1,342	1966	145,244	233	1996	126,451	39
1907	680,492	3,242	1937	589,856	1,413	1967	139,312	222	1997	126,429	30
1908	690,438	2,445	1938	541,528	1,105	1968	134,467	311	1998	122,083	29
1909	666,552	2,642	1939	539,375	1,078	1969	133,302	203	1999	114,489	35
1910	725,030	2,821	1940	533,267	1,388	1970	144,480	260	2000	108,098	38
1911	728,348	2,656	1941	546,692	1,266	1971	142,108	181	2001	114,458	42
1912	722,662	2,419	1942	530,861	1,471	1972	162,207	156	2002	110,966	28
1913	747,644	2,785	1943	486,516	1,451	1973	151,892	132	2003	104,824	30
1914	763,185	2,454	1944	453,937	1,298	1974	182,274	133	2004	108,734	28
1915	734,008	2,269	1945	437,921	1,068	1975	224,412	155	2005	116,436	23
1916	720,971	2,226	1946	463,079	968	1976	221,255	141	2006	122,975	47
1917	757,317	2,696	1947	490,356	1,158	1977	237,506	139	2007	122,936	34
1918	762,426	2,580	1948	507,333	999	1978	255,588	106	2008	133,828	30
1919	776,569	2,323	1949	485,306	585	1979	260,429	144	2009	134,089	18
1920	784,621	2,272	1950	483,239	643	1980	253,007	133	2010	135,500	48
1921	823,253	1,995	1951	441,905	785	1981	249,738	153	2011	143,437	20
1922	844,807	1,984	1952	401,329	548	1982	241,454	122	2012	137,650	20
1923	862,536	2,462	1953	351,126	461	1983	200,199	70	2013	123,259	20
1924	779,613	2,402	1954	283,705	396	1984	208,160	125	2014	116,010	16
1925	748,805	2,518	1955	260,089	420	1985	197,049	68	2015	102,804	12
1926	759,033	2,234	1956	260,285	448	1986	185,167	89	2016	81,485	8
1927	759,177	2,231	1957	254,725	478	1987	172,780	63	2017	82,843	15
1928	682,831	2,176	1958	224,890	358	1988	166,278	53	2018	82,699	12
1929	654,494	2,187	1959	203,597	293	1989	164,929	68			

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The effects of the Coal Act, OSHA, and MSHA brought forth a tremendous reduction in men going “under the hill.” In what Caudill described as the dark days of coal fatalities in the 1910s, over 2500 miners went “under the hill” on an average year (MSHA, 2019). Still, from 1960 to 1969, an average of 266 coal miners died on the job annually. In the decade that followed, as the Coal Act was implemented, deaths decreased to 155 a year, with deaths (albeit with far less coal miners) down to an average of 19 coal miners a year. Safety regulations on coal mining were needed and largely welcomed by coal miners. The power and sheer size of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) was critical to these reforms being enacted (Cowie, 2012). During the 1960s when safety regulations were under debate, the UMWA, like almost all American unions, was at the peak of its power. However, this era of union domination from the 1930s through the 1960s began to abruptly come to a halt. In the 1970s, unions began to decline in a manner that adversely impacted the coal industry. Just as the unionization breakthroughs earlier in the 20th century was representative of the fighting spirit of the Kentucky mountaineer, the massive safety regulations which passed Congress should be held and viewed in a similar regard. The nature of the UMWA’s decline and specific effects on coal miners will be covered at length later in this chapter.

While government regulations brought incredible progress on mine safety, the regulations by the Environmental Protection Agency were not greeted with the same level of acclaim. The Clean Air Act of 1970 unintentionally set off a boom in low-sulfur mining in the western United States at the cost of high-sulfur mines that populated the Eastern Kentucky coalfield (Kolstad, 2017). Additionally, debates over mountaintop-removal mining was also a divisive issue in Eastern Kentucky. While most protesters of mountaintop removal were local residents, mining

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families directed their anger at out-of-state “tree huggers” and the E.P.A. in Washington (Hansell, 2018; Catte, 2018). Today, many in Eastern Kentucky would argue that the real acronym of the E.P.A. ought to be “expanding poverty in America” (Hansell, 2018). Realistically, federal regulations had very little to do with the decline of the coal mining industry in Eastern Kentucky. Overall market forces, global oil prices, and the emergence of more cost-effective ways to produce energy did far more to sink the coal industry than federal regulations. The narrative of federal regulations destroying the coal industry should be understood more in terms of rural consciousness than fact. A federal regulation narrative conveniently fed into already existing attitudes of resentment citizens of Eastern Kentucky harbored against Washington elites. The feelings towards the E.P.A. and environmental regulation in Eastern Kentucky fit Kathy Cramer’s analysis of rural consciousness and political resentment which concludes this chapter. While the yellow journalism that sought to define Appalachia monolithically sowed some seeds of political resentment, regulations from Washington, regardless of actual effect, moved to give those seeds fertile ground on which to grow.

***Baker v. Carr*: Democratic Representation in Rural Communities**

While modern gerrymandered legislative maps might come across as unfair or crooked, taking a look at pre-1960s legislative districts might provide a new perspective. One of the most monumental court decisions in the political history of rural America was the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Baker v. Carr* in 1962. Before *Baker*, congressional districts were not drawn with the intent of having the equal amount of people in a district. Rather, they were constructed eyeball style with concern for equality in geographic size. In this setup, low-populated rural counties were overrepresented and large cities were underrepresented. In the era before *Baker*, rural areas

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had a much stronger political voice, albeit a disproportionately large one. Data estimates have found that the share of rural US House districts was cut by over 60 percent between 1962 and 2002. Just as critical a ruling as the *Baker* case was the Court’s ruling in *Reynolds v. Sims*. The 1964 *Reynolds* case applied the *Baker* framework to state legislative districts. Across the country, similar reductions in rural representation happened on the state legislative level. While these reductions in representation were fair, it resulted in a decline in rural political voice. Instead of one state legislator representing one county in Eastern Kentucky, one legislator might represent five small counties. In accounting for the consequences of *Baker v. Carr*, it is more plausible to see how the rural voters feel less heard. In Chapters Seven and Eight, I will examine the effects of these decisions on the amount of political representation at the state and federal level enjoyed by counties in the data set.

The Decline of Coal: Changes in Unions, the Labor Market, and the Family

In his book *Stayin’ Alive*, historian Jefferson Cowie argues that beginning in the early 1970s, blue-collar work in the United States started to embark upon a decades-long decline (Cowie, 2012). Since 1972, the American working class has experienced seismic changes in union power, the labor market, and the American family. Social scientists from Robert Putnam on the left and Charles Murray on the right have both pointed to a crisis in American life resulting from this decline of the working-class. Eastern Kentucky is a perfect case study for the major socioeconomic changes that the American working-class continues to grapple with. In this section, I argue that the trajectory of blue-collar work’s national decline can be applied to Eastern Kentucky: first, union power’s decline; second, the labor market’s shift against blue-collar work

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as a whole; and finally, the changes in the American family which affect family makeup, traditions, and employment.

For decades, the UMWA was considered the “battering ram” of the labor movement and workers rights in America (Cowie, 2012, p. 27). As a whole, American unions, led by the UMWA’s example, achieved tremendous success for the American worker in the years before 1972. Between 1947 and 1972, the weekly pay of “non-supervisory” workers went up 62 percent (Cowie, 2012). However, after 1972, the wages of non-supervisors have permanently stagnated (Cowie, 2012). Cowie applauds this period of time as a moment where “working-class people had a collective voice and sharp enough elbows at the political table to demand a larger slice of the economic pie” (Cowie, 2012, p. 20). Cowie traces the downfall of the American union to the period of 1968-1974 when union power collapsed. The perfect case study of union decline is the once all-powerful UMWA itself.

A common component in union decline across the country was the leadership of the union growing out of touch with the workers on the ground. In 1968, UMWA President Tony Boyle exemplified this trend. After a mining accident in Farmington, West Virginia that killed seventy-eight miners, Boyle chose to praise the safety record of the mine company instead of standing with his coal miners (Cowie, 2012). Furthermore, the passage of the aforementioned 1969 Coal Act was largely engineered by rank-and-file UMWA members acting without the blessing of Boyle and the union leadership (Cowie, 2012). After Boyle conducted North Korean-style voter fraud to ensure his reelection as the UMWA’s President in 1969, Boyle then opted to order the assassination of his arch-rival Jock Yablonski (Cowie, 2012). Many hoped the 1973 election of Arthur Miller, a former West Virginia coal miner and black lung activist, as

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President of the UMWA would bring a new era of reform. However, those hopes were short lived. Miller reneged on his promises to the rank-and-file, closed his political ranks, and was even accused by his allies of governing with a pervasive attitude of paranoia (Cowie, 2012). When Miller took office in 1973, a little over 400,000 man hours in the mines were lost to “wildcat strikes,” which are worker strikes conducted without approval from union leadership (Cowie, 2010). In 1976, the number ballooned to just shy of 2 million man hours (Cowie, 2012). Local miners in Eastern Kentucky and across the country lost confidence in the ability of their national unions to be effective advocates for them. By the time Miller retired as President in 1979, the UMWA was nearly feckless in its ability to fight for better wages, hours, and working conditions for their employees.

Just as the UMWA hit rock bottom, the coal mining profession as a whole also started declining. Explanations given for the decline of coal vary from environmental regulations, to the growth of fracking, and the rise of global oil prices (Klostad, 2017). As mentioned earlier in the Chapter, the combination of market forces and more cost-effective forms of energy production were at the forefront of the coal industry’s decline. Federal regulations played little effect. Still regardless of the cause of coal’s decline, the impact on employment in Appalachia. Table 5.1 details the gargantuan decline of coal miners employed in Appalachia.

Table 5.1: Total Miners Employed in Appalachia, 1950-2014 (Hansell, 2018)

Year	Total Miners Employed in Appalachia
1950	196,000
1970	38,000
1980	97,000
1990	48,000

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2000	29,000
2014	18,000

While the coal industry did enjoy a brief recovery in the late 1970s as a result of a global energy crisis, the hopes for coal’s return proved a living mirage (Hansell, 2018). Although many in Eastern Kentucky alleged that President Obama was waging a “War on Coal,” market forces and employment trends demonstrate that the coal industry was in decline decades before Barack Obama sat in the Resolute Desk. By the end of 2014, there was not a single union mine operating in all of Kentucky (Lovan, 2015). As the coal industry declined in Eastern Kentucky, the once powerful UMWA failed to protect its employees. Instead of leaning on their union, coal miners grew to distrust the UMWA, as well as institutions of government as a whole (Cowie, 2012; Hansell, 2018). If updated through 2019, the number of coal mining jobs would be even smaller than the 2014 totals.

The economic struggles faced by coal miners mirrored the challenges blue-collar workers faced across the country. Back in 1970, manufacturing jobs made up 26.4 percent of the United States labor force (Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Louis, 2013). Today, manufacturing makes up under 10 percent of the labor market (Cass 2018). In observing the barren manufacturing economy that remains in American today, it is important to understand the comforts of blue-collar work in the 1970s. Oren Cass points out in his book, *The Once and Future Worker*, that manufacturing related positions account for close to 40 percent of good-paying blue-collar work (Cass, 2018). Coal mining is a perfect example of this phenomena. The average Kentucky coal miner made a salary between \$60,000 and \$90,000, which ranges between three to four

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times higher than the median family income of the county they lived in (Catte, 2018; Flippen, 2014). Despite the many risks associated with coal mining, jobs in the coal industry were incredibly desirable because of their pay (Robertson, 2019).

One key political-cultural implication of coal mining’s decline was a changed dynamic between work and families. No coal county demonstrates this more than Letcher County, Kentucky, whose schools are later examined in this work’s data set. In 2009, the labor force in Letcher County was dominated by men, who made up over 60 percent of the workforce (Robertson, 2019). By 2019, the workforce in Letcher County was majority women (Robertson, 2019). During that period, the 1,300 coal jobs that remained in Letcher County shrunk to 100 (Robertson, 2019). For decades in many Letcher County households there was a pervasive attitude that husbands would work in the mines to bring home enough money so that their wives could take care of their homes. Letcher County has reinvented itself; it should not come as a surprise that the county possesses one of few successful school districts at mitigating starting-line inequalities in schools. However, when good paying mining jobs disappeared, the social attitudes concerning women and work had to follow.

Unsurprisingly, the major industry of growth in Eastern Kentucky is healthcare. In many ways, the symmetrical decline of coal mining and the growth in health care employment is unsurprising. The opioid crisis, which will be covered later in this chapter, created a new industry of care in Eastern Kentucky (Macy, 2018). Additionally, the physically demanding nature of working in the mines, and the growth of black lung disease alongside that, has also led to a new need for respiratory care (Robertson, 2019). The need for nurses in Eastern Kentucky is so great that five-digit signing bonuses are expected in the profession (Robertson, 2019).

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Notably, in all of Letcher County’s medical facilities, there are only four male nurses (Robertson, 2019). Many men in Letcher County have found health care work unappealing, underpaying, or are ones where they lack the training necessary to participate (Robertson, 2019). Social scientist Robert Putnam studies the conundrum of “opportunity youth,” men aged 16-24 who are neither working or enrolled in schools (Putnam, 2015). Putnam estimates that one “opportunity youth” costs the local economy upwards of \$37,000 (Putnam, 2015). While Letcher County’s 16-24 population is too small to be measured, the rate of “disconnected youth” in neighboring counties hovers around the twenty-five percent mark and has continued to rise over time (Measure of America, 2019).

As a whole, Appalachia has experienced changes to family structure that is consistent with the rest of the country: higher divorce rates, lower marriage rates, higher cohabitation rates, women working more, and men working less (Ziliak, 2012; Putnam, 2015). In response to declining marriage rates, the federal government now earmarks over \$150 million a year in marriage incentives (Ziliak, 2012). However, marriage incentives may not be the best correction to family poverty in Eastern Kentucky. The percentage of single mothers as breadwinners nearly doubled between 1990 and 2009, a number that will continue to increase if the labor market trends Letcher County has experienced since 2009 are reflected across the region (Ziliak, 2012). Furthermore research has demonstrated that in any nonmetropolitan area, any 1 percent increase in women’s hardship, which marriage incentives contribute to, leads to a subsequent .5 percent increase in the local poverty rate (Ziliak, 2012). Although the poverty rates in Appalachia have decreased over time, the poverty rate in Central Appalachia would be 3.2 percentage points lower if not for changes in family structure during the last thirty years (Ziliak, 2012).

Perfectly Imperfect Timing: The Opioid Crisis Hits

In 1995, the pharmaceutical company Purdue Frederick developed the drug Oxycontin (Macy, 2018). The drug was approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use in end-of-life pain management. However, such a use was not what Purdue Frederick, and its marketing arm, Purdue Pharma, intended. Purdue launched a marketing campaign that sought to enshrine a patient’s level of pain as medicine’s fifth vital sign (Macy, 2018). Purdue Pharma’s goal was to sell as much Oxycontin as humanly possible; sales reps from Purdue Pharma dropped off gifts to prospective Oxy prescribing doctors at every holiday, a practice including but not limited to the delivery of Valentine’s Day flowers, Thanksgiving turkeys, and Christmas trees (Macy, 2018). It is no wonder that between 1996 to 2000, pharmaceutical giants increased their direct marketing spending by 64 percent, with \$4.04 billion spent on those efforts (Macy, 2018). Before delving more deeply into the impact of the opioid crisis in Appalachia, it bears importance to distinguish the nature of our nation’s current Oxycodone inspired opioid crisis. The opioid crisis of today was not created by assortments of illegal, black market drugs that were smuggled through poorly guarded seaports or weak borders; rather, the opioid crisis was created because of turning a blind eye to the abuse of one legal prescription drug, Oxycodone.

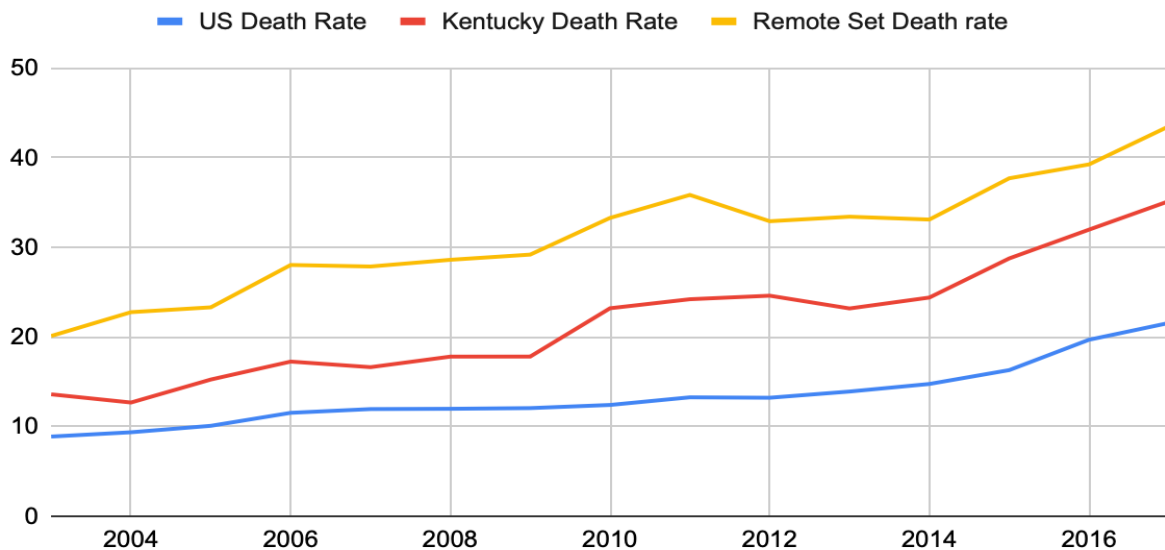
Before Oxycodone was developed there was no absence of prescription opioids being abused in Appalachia: vicodin, percocet, and dilaudid were readily available in the black market before 1996 (Macy, 2018). Critically, vicodin, percocet, and dilaudid were weaker drugs, usually coming in ten or twenty milligram pills. OxyContin is not only a higher strength painkiller than the three aforementioned painkillers but doses between two and four times stronger than their peer drugs (Macy, 2018). While the opioid crisis has seared every American community,

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Appalachia was ground zero of the crisis. Purdue Pharma has pillaged and exploited Eastern Kentucky just as coal operators did before them. Purdue Pharma executives focused their marketing of Oxycontin to areas with disproportionately high workplace disability rates; naturally, as the coal mining economy collapsed in Appalachia, the region was ripe for their picking (Macy, 2018). Figure 5.2 shows how overdose deaths in the remote rural set have far eclipsed those in the rest of the country for decades.

Figure 5.2, Drug Overdose Crude Death Rates, 2003-2017 (NORC, n.d.)

US Death Rate, Kentucky Death Rate and Remote Set Death rate



Now, as Table 5.2 demonstrates the body count from opioids in Eastern Kentucky coalfields dwarfs that from the coalfields from 2013-2017. Drug overdose data in Elliot, Menifee, Morgan, and Owsley Counties are suppressed; however, such data if available likely strengthen the table but not in a statistically significant manner. Again, data tables in this chapter that refer to “dataset counties” refer to the counties listed in Table 2.2 of this work.

Table 5.2: Coal Accident and Opioid Overdoses as Sources of Death in Dataset Counties, 2013-2017 (NORC, 2018; Estep, 2014; Kenning, 2015; Lovan, 2016; Lovan, 2016; Estep, 2018)

Source of Death in Dataset Counties, 2013-2017	Total Fatalities, 2013-2017
Coal Mining Accident	10
Drug Overdose	~603

Table 5.2 clearly demonstrates that drug overdoses are leaving behind nearly as many bodies over a five year period in Appalachia than the coal industry did at its peak in Appalachia.

Additionally, the lack of economic diversification beyond coal and factories in all of Central Appalachia played into the hands of the opioid crisis. Coal miners and factory workers, two populations prone to workplace injuries, were often victims of Purdue Pharma’s pill-pushing physicians and salesmen (Macy, 2018). Concurrently, as blue-collar jobs disappeared, one of the best ways to make a living became selling Oxycodone to your neighbors (Macy, 2018).

Pharmaceutical companies are flooding small counties across Central Appalachia with the amount sent to counties with substantially higher populations. In Bell County, Kentucky, doctors prescribed 249.9 opioids per person in 2016 (Center for Disease Control, n.d.). That rate of prescription is nearly four times the national average of 58.7 prescriptions a person (Center for Disease Control, n.d.). Table 5.3 documents the rates of opioid prescription in the counties studied in this project as well as national and state averages for 2016. All averages for the dataset are weighted by the collective population of the counties studied. The data point titled “Rest of Kentucky” surveys prescription rates in the non dataset counties in Kentucky. Table 5.4

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demonstrates that the dataset counties have nearly twice as many prescriptions for opioids as their population size would indicate.

Table 5.3: Rates of Opioid Prescription Per Capita in Dataset Counties, 2016 (CDC, n.d.; Census Bureau, 2018)

Area Surveyed	Opioids Prescribed per person
<i>Dataset Counties Average</i>	161.4
<i>Rest of Kentucky Counties Average</i>	89.6
<i>National Average</i>	66.5

Table 5.4: Share of Population & Opioid Prescriptions in Kentucky (CDC, n.d.; Census Bureau, 2018)

Area Surveyed	Share of opioid prescriptions written in Kentucky	Share of Kentucky’s population
<i>Dataset Counties Average</i>	17.66%	10.63%
<i>Rest of Kentucky</i>	82.34%	89.37%

An often tried line by Purdue Pharma was that the opioid crisis was not caused by Oxycodone but by the people using the drugs (Macy, 2018). However, as the average rate of opioid prescriptions dispensed in economically distressed counties in the Eastern Kentucky coalfield is just under twice the state and 250 percent higher than the national average for opioid prescriptions filled, Purdue Pharma’s attempt to blame the population addicted to Oxycodone for the crisis holds no basis in empirical fact. The fact that the overdose mortality rate is 65 percent higher in Appalachia is not the fault of the people that live there; rather, it is the fault of the

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pharmaceutical company that fraudulently misrepresented the addictive nature of their signature drug and the government regulators who were too slow to respond to the crisis at hand (Macy, 2018).

The regulatory failures that exacerbated the opioid crisis serve to legitimize the popular distrust of government in Eastern Kentucky. It would be a lie to suggest that the opioid crisis has grown slowly and steadily in Eastern Kentucky. The crisis has been going on for decades; yet, for too often it was dismissed as a rural issue or not an issue at all (Macy, 2018). The blame for the opioid crisis facing Eastern Kentucky can be placed on a variety of sources: coal companies, whose workplace negligence was a common cause of injuries; federal regulators, who took jobs with Purdue Pharma instead of regulate the company; and critically, Purdue Pharma itself, who fraudulently marketed Oxycontin and evades responsibility for their drug’s impact. In Eastern Kentucky, the crisis is seen as another burden manufactured by politicians and a pill-pushing drug company from the East Coast.

Rural Consciousness, Political Resentment, and “Trump Country”: EKY Today

The decline of the coal mining industry in Eastern Kentucky hit the region in a way that transcended basic economic loss. Coal mining’s decline took a remarkable emotional toll, leaving many in Eastern Kentucky with the feeling that their social capital was being robbed. Social capital can broadly be defined as “links, shared values, and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together” (Keely, 2007, p. 102). For over a century, the mineral resources of Eastern Kentucky were extracted by out-of-state corporations for fractions of their actual worth (Caudill, 1962; Hansell, 2018). Through most of the twentieth century, in exchange for this extraction of resources, the out-of-state corporations

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who ran the mines did provide decently paying jobs, albeit after pressure from the UMWA. However, as the jobs in the coal industry began to disappear, the popular sentiment of folks in Eastern Kentucky was that they had been robbed. However, while the shifty practices of coal mine operators created a generational distrust of outsiders in the twentieth century, the decline of the coal industry brought a decline in social capital that now manifests itself through a unique form of rural consciousness and a politics of resentment (Litcher and Cimbault, 2012).

In *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*, political scientist Kathy Cramer created a framework through which politically frustrated communities in rural America can be studied and understood. While Cramer’s research focuses on rural towns in Wisconsin, her analysis can be extended to other rural communities across the country. Cramer roots her findings through the presence of a phenomenon known as rural consciousness. At the beginning of her work, Cramer stresses the impact of the Great Recession in rural communities. While the rich lost money in the recession, they got it back; the bottom income quartile lost 85 percent of their wealth and has not recovered (Cramer, 2016). Cramer places the frustrations of rural voters in the context of a theory she labels “rural consciousness” (Cramer, 2016). Rural consciousness is defined by Cramer as “a sense that decision makers routinely ignore rural places and fail to give rural communities their fair share of resources, as well as a sense that rural folks are fundamentally different from urbanites in terms of lifestyles, values, and work ethic. Rural consciousness signals an identification with rural people and denotes a multifaceted resentment against cities” (Cramer, 2016). In a vacuum, rural consciousness is rooted in a feeling of injustice, that as rural voters they feel as if they have been

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cheated by the system. While Cramer’s book focuses on the rise of Scott Walker in Wisconsin, the variable of rural consciousness can also help explain the rise of populism in Appalachia.

Cramer breaks rural complaints into three parts: rural areas are ignored, rural areas do not get their fair share of resources, and rural lifestyles are both fundamentally different and incredibly misunderstood by city folk. Cramer highlights the complex relationship between rural communities, political power, and political voice. Cramer stresses that “power is partly about respect, recognition, and listening” (Cramer, 2016). The rural voters Cramer interacted with felt unheard. These individuals felt “overlooked by decision makers” which they “attributed to place” (Cramer, 2016). These voters “expected to be listened to” and did not feel as if they were (Cramer, 2016). The frustrations of these rural voters were rooted in feelings of distributive injustice, a belief that, when compared to the big cities of their state, they were not getting their fair share. Cramer’s Wisconsin study groups believed that their representatives in Madison and Washington “sent little to their community but junk mail and poop” (Cramer, 2016).

Cramer’s frameworks of rural consciousness can be easily applied to the counties studied in our dataset. First, voters in Eastern Kentucky showcase Cramer’s first characteristic of rural consciousness: a feeling of ignorance. The strongest piece of evidence for this phenomenon is voter returns from the 2016 election. In the counties studied in this project, Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump far outperformed their numbers in the rest of the state and the country. Table 5.5 shows how well Sanders finished in the counties studied than the rest of Kentucky and the country in the 2016 Democratic Party Primaries. Table 5.6 demonstrates the significant margin of victory President Trump enjoyed in the counties studied as opposed to the state of Kentucky and the rest of the country in the general election.

Table 5.5: 2016 Democratic Primary Voting Breakdown (New York Times, 2016)

Area	Clinton Votes	Clinton %	Sanders Votes	Sanders %
<i>Dataset Counties</i>	14,595	34.53%	23,306	55.14%
<i>Rest of Kentucky</i>	197,955	48.13%	187,320	45.54%
<i>United States</i>	16,914,722	55.20%	13,206,428	43.10%

Table 5.6: 2016 Presidential Election Voting Breakdown (New York Times, 2016)

Area	Clinton Votes	Clinton %	Trump Votes	Trump %
<i>Dataset Counties</i>	35,141	18.80%	146,529	78.38%
<i>Rest of Kentucky</i>	593,713	34.18%	1,056,442	60.81%
<i>United States</i>	6,5853,625	48%	62,985,106	45.90%

Since the 2016 election, there has been a popular tendency in the literature to view Appalachia as “Trump Country” (Catte, 2018). There is no doubt that Eastern Kentucky is one of President Trump’s strongest bases of support; to say otherwise when Trump performed almost 18 percentage points better than the dataset counties than the rest of the state and 33 percentage points better than his national average would be ignorant (New York Times, 2016). However, often forgotten in the “Trump Country” literature is the performance of Bernie Sanders in Kentucky earlier that year. Sanders performed just under 9 points better in the dataset counties, averaging just under 55 percent of the votes there. Concurrently, Hillary Clinton underperformed her state total by over 16 percentage points in *both* the primary and the general election in Eastern Kentucky. The common variable between the Trump and Sanders campaigns was their populist appeal. Both campaigns appealed to voters frustrated with the status quo (Catte, 2018).

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Furthermore, both campaigns did something that the Clinton campaign and politicians for decades before failed to do: show up.

Additionally, the successes of the Sanders and Trump campaigns in this project’s selected counties also links to Cramer’s second key variable in rural consciousness: a feeling of distributive injustice rooted in the belief that rural communities are not getting their fair share of resources. Both Sanders and Trump made similar arguments to rural communities, albeit in different ways. Sanders blamed the top one percent of Americans in the income bracket for taking from those who need it. On the other hand, Trump more often blamed Democrats for directing federal assistance to cities and stringently regulating towns. Regardless of truth value, the arguments that Sanders and Trump made in Appalachia stuck with the voters they encountered. This should not come as a surprise considering the impact Appalachia’s history has had on shaping its political culture. Centuries of abuse from out-of-state coal companies and, now, out-of-state pharmaceutical companies, contributes to an overwhelming sense of distributive injustice that the Sanders and Trump campaigns heard, listened to, and legitimized.

The final element of rural consciousness is manifested through a belief that members of rural communities live fundamentally different, misunderstood, and more difficult lives than those who live in big cities (Cramer, 2016). In this way, members of rural communities believe their struggles to be compounded by people who live in cities (Cramer, 2016). Such patterns are quite noticeable in Eastern Kentucky, however, in a way that is not traditionally uplifted. I argue that the idea of folks in Eastern Kentucky being different, misunderstood, and more difficult lives stems from the promotion of false stories about the region clouding the achievements and nature of Eastern Kentucky. The branding of Appalachia as “different” is not as intrinsic to

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Appalachians than by narratives promoted by non-Appalachians (Catte, 2016). Appalachian scholar Elizabeth Catte points out that popular use of “othering” in literature, which involves presenting Appalachians as “isolated, culturally backward, and dying out,” manufactures feelings of difference and a categorizing of Appalachians as “yesterday’s people” (Catte, 2016). Catte argues that in the face of coal’s decline these narratives of “difference” from the outside world often cloud out the triumphs of Appalachians, especially in worker’s rights protests which continue to the day (Catte, 2016). Between July and September 2019, laid off coal miners in Harlan County, Kentucky staged a blockade on the train tracks to prevent the shipment of their former employer from leaving the state until they received their back pay (Robertson, 2019; Sandoval, Almasy, and Ly, 2019). Seldom do such acts of radical labor protests gain the same traction as “Trump Country” pieces in the national press (Catte, 2018). I am not arguing that we ought to turn a blind eye to the massive poverty the region experiences; however, I would argue that attempts to paint Appalachia as a white, conservative monolith distorts truths about the region. In Appalachia, rural consciousness is not rooted in a personal feeling of difference and misunderstanding from the rest of the country as much as it is rooted in how much the rest of the country misunderstands Appalachia.

Chapter 6: Unequal at the Starting Line: Behind by Fourth Grade

Chapter Overview:

This chapter will begin by addressing “starting-line” factors, namely public health, child development, and economic inequality. The specific factors studied were first listed in Table 3.4, which is copied below.

Table 3.4: Factors Considered in Starting-Line Variables

Category	Variables Included
Public Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State Health Factor County Ranking 2. Obesity Rate 3. Flu Shot Recipient Rate 4. Disability Rate 5. Person to Physician Rate 6. Person to Mental Health Professional Rate
Child Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rate of Mothers Receiving Prenatal Care 2. Rate of Mothers Smoking During Pregnancy 3. Low-Birth Weights Rate 4. Teen Birth Rate 5. Adult Educational Attainment Rates 6. Foster Care Rate 7. Rate of Children Living with Grandparents
Economic Inequality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unemployment Rate 2. Child Poverty Rate 3. Deep Poverty Rate 4. Children Living in High Poverty Areas Rate

In my analysis, it will be found that students in the dataset, especially in the remote rural counties, are unequal to their peers by the time they even reach the educational starting line. The goal of this chapter is to systematically outline the status-quo at the starting line in the remote rural counties, thus setting up a study of how successfully these inequalities are mitigated. A

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study of how institutions of government at every level are doing at treating those inequalities will be left for Chapters Eight through Ten.

Given the findings regarding the large starting-line inequalities present in the remote rural counties, I will predict that most of the remote districts will be classified as “low opportunity” school districts within the Model of Educational Opportunity. At the conclusion of this Chapter, districts perform on fourth grade exams will be measured. Those standardized tests yield the x-axis of the Model of Educational Opportunity. As a whole, this chapter moves to outline the quantitative state of play at the educational starting-line that institutions of government must contend with.

Starting-Line Variable-I: Public Health

In education and public health circles, there exists an incredible breadth of literature that correlates student performance on standardized tests and factors involving public health. The counties in the remote rural part of the dataset rank at the very bottom of Kentucky’s counties for factors relating to public health (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2019). Table 6.1 provides the rankings of the dataset counties in the state of Kentucky according to health factors.

Table 6.1: Remote Rural Set Health Factors Ranking, (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, n.d.)

County	Health Factor Ranking (of 120 Counties)
Elliott	105
Jackson	108
Knott	103
Lee	117
Letcher	106
McCreary	112

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Magoffin	111
Martin	110
Menifee	101
Morgan	102
Owsley	119
Wolfe	116

As Table 6.1 demonstrates, the counties in the remote rural set comprise twelve of the bottom twenty counties in the state of Kentucky for health factors. Especially in terms of factors that disproportionately pose barriers to student success, Eastern Kentucky does even worse.

Specifically, rates of adult and childhood obesity, flu shots, disability rates, access to physicians, and access to mental health professionals are far below state and national averages. Table 6.2 compares some of these variables in the remote rural set to the rest of the country.

Table 6.2: Comparison of Health Factors (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, n.d., Census Bureau, 2018)

Variable	Remote Rural Set	Rest of Kentucky	US Average
Adult Obesity Rate	37.3% Obese	33.9% Obese	30.9% Obese
Flu Shot Received	31% Received	43.4% Received	45.3% Received
Disability Rate, 0 to 5 Year Olds	3.7% Disability	1% Disability	1% Disability
Disability Rate, 5 to 17 Year Olds	10.7% Disability	7% Disability	5.4% Disability
Disability Rate, Total	28.6% Disability	16.9% Disability	12.6% Disability
People:Physician	2935:1 ratio	1520:1 ratio	339:1 ratio
People:Mental Health Professional	965:1 ratio	482:1 ratio	404:1 ratio

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First, the American obesity epidemic clearly is making its mark on Kentucky, with the remote counties demonstrating higher rates of obesity than both state and national averages. As a whole, the state of Kentucky enjoys the fifth highest rate of obesity of any state in the country (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, n.d.). Notably, childhood obesity rates are not broken down by county. As has been the trend with every other public health marker analyzed, there is strong reason to expect that the childhood obesity rate in the remote rural counties studied would be higher. However, it is still critical to point out that Kentucky ranks sixth of all states in childhood obesity, with nearly 16 percent of two to four-year-olds qualifying as obese (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, n.d.).

The rate of individuals receiving a flu shot is also lower in the remote rural set. School attendance is a critical component for student improvement between fourth and eighth grade. A higher number of residents who did not get the flu shot does bring greater potential risks for students being sick and missing school days for the flu. The fact that the remote set’s flu shot numbers are twelve points below the state and fourteen points below the national average are a cause for concern.

Finally, the remote rural set displays incredibly high rates of disability. Although some counties did not report the amount of disabled newborns to five-year-olds; however, the sample size (~6,000) is more than healthy. At all ages, the disability rate in the remote set counties is substantially larger than the remainder of Kentucky and the national average. These results matter for two key reasons. First, disability rates are heavily correlated with above average poverty rates (Altiraifi, 2019). Disabled Americans lack job security, struggle to find adequate housing, and often rely on public transportation (paratransit). All of these disadvantages are

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exacerbated for disabled Americans living in a rural area; the hills of Eastern Kentucky compound these existing inequalities. Additionally, high disability rates have served as a pathway for pharmaceutical companies to nudge their way into Appalachia and prescribe opiates en masse (Macy, 2018). The high incidence of disabilities of all stripes in Eastern Kentucky brought the massive opioid prescription rate previously mentioned in Chapter Five.

Finally, I pulled the data relating to the number of persons per primary care physician and per mental health professional. The first trend largely pertains to the other data above, which demonstrates that the increased health needs of many in these rural counties are not with enough doctors to respond to them. Specifically, data which shows that adults in these counties find themselves having significantly higher “poor mental health days” is connected to outcomes in child development and economic inequalities (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, n.d.). As a whole, Eastern Kentucky is significantly less healthy on every factor examined than both in-state and national benchmarks, putting students at greater risk of falling behind at the starting-line.

Starting-Line Variable-II: Child Development:

In this section, I plan on detailing the state of play regarding issues surrounding child development. Specifically, I plan on evaluating the state of prenatal care, smoking rates of expecting mothers, low birth weights, teen births, marriage rates, educational attainment, foster care rolls, and “grandparenting.” In each factor examined, it will be found that living in a remote rural area further exacerbates the preponderance of negative factors. Entire books are written about many of the factors measured in this chapter and how they relate to school performance. However, as this thesis is concerned with governmental institutions, I will only stick to reporting

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major findings, providing a brief explanation of them, and will revisit them in later chapters, as they pertain to federal, state, and local policies.

For the data used in this section, I will use information that is closest to the ages of students studied in the data set, which is students between fourth and eighth grade in the years 2009 to 2015. As this work is most concerned with students who were fourth graders in 2009-2011 and eighth graders between 2013-2015, using data between 2000 and 2002 would be most optimal. When measuring the rates of mothers who smoked while pregnant, it would be far more worthwhile to measure smoking rates closer to the time in which the children this work studies were born than it would be to study the rates of mothers who smoked after these children graduated high school. However, such data is often unavailable, so this work will move to extrapolate the data most recent to the students this project concerns.

Our overview of child development begins with access to prenatal care. Table 6.3 lays out the rates of which new mothers in the dataset counties have access to prenatal care.

Table 6.3: Rate of Mothers Receiving Early and Regular Prenatal Care, 2008-2010 (Anne E, Casey Center, 2019)

Geographic Area	% of Mothers who received early and regular Prenatal Care
Full Dataset	59.32%
<i>Fringe School Districts</i>	56.21%
<i>Distant School Districts</i>	62.30%
<i>Remote School Districts</i>	58.95%
Rest of Kentucky	65.37%

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Clearly, the counties in the dataset do not meet national standards for prenatal care. A key recommendation that prenatal care providers often give is for mothers who smoke to stop doing so during the term of their pregnancy. Smoking during pregnancy raises the likelihood of preterm births, low birth weights, birth defects, and the onset of other developmental disorders (CDC, 2018). Table 6.4 displays the astronomically high rates of smoking by parents in the counties studied in this work.

Table 6.4: Smoking Rates of Pregnant Mothers, 2008-2010 (Anne E, Casey Center, 2019)

Geographic Area	% of Mothers who smoked during their pregnancy
Full Dataset	36.9%
<i>Fringe School Districts</i>	37.0%
<i>Distant School Districts</i>	36.4%
<i>Remote School Districts</i>	37.3%
Rest of Kentucky	22.1%
United States Average	23.8%

Considering the results listed in Table 6.4, it should not be a surprise, as detailed in Table 6.5, that the amount of children in the dataset with “low” birth weights surpasses the state and national averages.

Table 6.5: Rate of Low Birth Weights, 2008-2010, (Anne E, Casey Center, 2019)

Geographic Area	% of children with low birth weights
Full Dataset	11.0%
<i>Fringe School Districts</i>	11.0%

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<i>Distant School Districts</i>	10.6%
<i>Remote School Districts</i>	11.5%
Rest of Kentucky	8.5%
United States Average	8.2%

Numerous scholars have connected prenatal care and birth weight to how students perform in elementary school (Chatterji, Kim, and Lahiri, 2014; Breslau, Paneth, and Lucia, 2004; Breslau, Johnson, and Lucia, 2001). The results of these studies were striking. Low birth weight children averaged deficits three to five points below their peers who had normal birth weights (Breslau, Paneth, and Lucia, 2004). Differences in achievement manifested more heavily in math than in reading scores, which could help explain the dataset’s struggles on mathematics exams (Breslau, Johnson, and Lucia, 2004).

In addition to initial child development factors, the role of parents in shaping their children’s education should not be overlooked. The first variable I investigate is the teen birth rate, fully broadcasted in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6: Teen Birth Rate in Dataset, (Anne E, Casey Center, 2019)

Geographic Area	% of Teen Births
Full Dataset	6.23%
<i>Fringe School Districts</i>	6.59%
<i>Distant School Districts</i>	5.83%
<i>Remote School Districts</i>	6.02%
Rest of Kentucky	3.27%
United States Average	3.7%

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Teen childbearing is incredibly consequential for child development. In 2017, the rate of teen mothers receiving late or inadequate prenatal care was higher than any other demographic (Child Trends, 2019). Furthermore, most studies estimate that teen mothers lose between 0.7 and 1.9 years of schooling as a result of having a child (Kane, Morgan, Harris, and Guilkey, 2013). Table 6.7, which measures the amount of adults in each subset who have achieved a bachelor's degree shows this trend in action.

Table 6.7: Educational Attainment in the Dataset (Census Bureau, 2018)

Geographic Area	% of Adults with a Bachelor’s Degree
Full Dataset	11.5%
<i>Fringe School Districts</i>	11.4%
<i>Distant School Districts</i>	13.2%
<i>Remote School Districts</i>	9.5%
Rest of Kentucky	21%
United States Average	27.5%

The educational attainment gap between the remote set and the other variables is indisputably stark. As the table demonstrates, the amount of adults holding a college degree in the remote set counties is barely one-third the national average (Table 6.7). Curiously, however, women enjoyed higher rates of achieving bachelor’s degrees in every county in the dataset. Letcher County was the only exception, as the amount of men and women achieving bachelor’s degrees was a tie. Table 6.8 looks to a related trend, the amount of births to mothers lacking high school diplomas.

Table 6.8: Births to Mothers without High School Diploma, 2008-2010,
(Anne E, Casey Center, 2019)

Geographic Area	% of births to mothers without a high school diploma
Full Dataset	25.85%
<i>Fringe School Districts</i>	25.92%
<i>Distant School Districts</i>	24.38%
<i>Remote School Districts</i>	27.73%
Rest of Kentucky	18.7%
United States Average	17%

Table 6.9 demonstrates the continuous trend of low educational attainment in the substantially above the national average.

In terms of child development, having two parents lacking college degrees has multifaceted impacts through a child’s entire educational journey. Experts in early-childhood education point to the existence of a “word gap,” where children born to less educated, lower-income parents hear less words, limiting their vocabulary (Lahey, 2014). Estimates show that by kindergarten begins, the “word gap” is over thirty million words (Lahey, 2014). Students with a higher word bank are considered more prepared for kindergarten and further shape outcomes including test scores, college attendance, and income levels (Lahey, 2014; Albin, 2015).

During Chapter Five of this work, I also discussed changes to the family in Eastern Kentucky. In particular, I discussed massive increases in female participation in the labor force in the dataset counties, exemplified in Letcher County. Further, as Robert Putnam explains in *Our*

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Kids, marriage rates are useful factors in analyzing child development. Nonetheless, marriage rates are best measured across decades instead of against averages. Such data is not available on a county-by-county level. However, changes in marriage rates can be well understood in terms of educational attainment. From 1975 to 2011, out-of-wedlock births for women with college degrees increased from five to ten percent; during the same period of time, the rate of out-of-wedlock births for women who did not have a college degree skyrocketed from 22 percent to 65 percent (Putnam, 2015). Especially in blue-collar households, marriage rates have plummeted. However, for working-class couples who stay married, the results have not been much better. While 55 percent of working-class households reported being in very happy marriages in 1970, only 25 percent reported the same in 2010 (Murray, 2013). More children are also being raised in single parent households, especially in working class families, especially in areas like Eastern Kentucky. In 1960, 6 percent of American kids lived in a single-parent home; today, over half of our kids are expected to have that experience (Putnam, 2016). Putnam accurately explains that “early life experiences get under your skin in a most powerful way” (Putnam 2016). The stress that American families have experienced in the past six decades has been critical in reshaping the direction of America’s schools and perpetuating Eastern Kentucky’s achievement gaps.

As discussed earlier, the opioid crisis has had a tremendous effect on all of Appalachia, with particular impacts on child development. Two key ways in which the opioid crisis has manifested is in children not living with their parents. Foster care rolls are one way to measure the alarming growth of the opioid crisis. Table 6.9 details foster care enrollment in the period between 2011 and 2013 and again between 2016 and 2018.

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Table 6.9: Foster Care Rolls, 2011-2013 and 2016-2018 (Anne E, Casey Center, 2019)

Geographic Area	% of children living in foster care, 2011-2013	% of children living in foster care, 2016-2018	Change
Full Dataset	4.63%	5.8%	+1.16%
<i>Fringe Schools</i>	5.9%	6.7%	+0.77%
<i>Distant Schools</i>	2.4%	4.7%	+2.29%
<i>Remote Schools</i>	6.2%	6.3%	+0.09%
Rest of Kentucky	3.4%	4.6%	+1.20%
United States	0.5%	0.6%	0.07%

Both the state of Kentucky and the counties in the dataset experienced a spike in children entering the foster care system at a rate between eleven and twelve times the national average between the two measurements in Table 6.9. The already high foster care rates in rural remote counties began to be experienced by the rest of Eastern Kentucky and the entire state.

As foster care rolls have shot up, so has the amount of children in Kentucky living with their grandparents. Kentucky has the highest rate of grandparents raising their grandchildren of any state in the country (Gillespie, 2018). Table 6.10 provides the total amount of children living with their grandparents.

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Table 6.10: School Aged Children Living with Grandparents, (Census Bureau, 2018)

Geographic Area	School-aged children living with grandparents	% of students in district living with grandparents
Full Dataset	10,471	14.25%
<i>Fringe Schools</i>	3,326	16.4%
<i>Distant Schools</i>	3,673	12.9%
<i>Remote Schools</i>	3,694	18%
Rest of Kentucky	53,345	8.32%
United States	-----	~4.0%

Kentucky’s rate of “grandparenting” is twice the national average. Yet, the rate of grandparenting in the remote rural set is twice the rate of the rest of the state. Robert Putnam points out that the increasing role of grandparents today serves to exacerbate inequalities in child development. On one hand, wealthier grandparents are able to financially supplement the educational and life pursuits of their grandchildren (Putnam, 2015). On the other hand, while lower-income grandparents who take over for their children leave their grandchildren better off, they are generally unsuccessful in limiting achievement gaps. In many cases, as Putnam describes, grandparenting for lower-income youth tends to “replace younger, poor, less educated (and now often missing) caregivers with older, poor, less educated caregivers” (Putnam, 2015, p. 114). Wealthy grandparents help their children and grandchildren become *even more* socially mobile. On the other hand, lower-income grandparents who take on the role of parent face an uphill battle where helping their grandchildren maintain their economic status could be considered a victory (Putnam, 2015).

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If we were to combine the number of children living with their grandparents with the number of children in foster care in the remote set, we would reach 24.4 percent, just under one quarter of students in the school district. Such a trend is an incredible challenge to child growth and development, thus creating vast inequalities well before children even begin to attend kindergarten.

Starting-Line Variable III: Economic Disadvantages

Much of the factors discussed in the two preceding sections are both causal and correlating to issues of economic inequality. This section will provide a very brief overview of the following economic issues: unemployment, child poverty rates, children living in deep poverty, and children living in high poverty areas.

First, unemployment rates provide us a glimpse into the economic ebbs and flows Eastern Kentucky has experienced in the last two decades. Table 6.12 examines the unemployment rate in the region at six critical junctures.

Table 6.12: Unemployment in Eastern Kentucky (Anne E, Casey Center, 2019)

Area	2002, Unemployment	2006, Unemployment	2010, Unemployment	2014, Unemployment	2016, Unemployment
<i>Dataset</i>	7.6%	7.7%	12.7%	9.9%	9.5%
<i>Fringe</i>	7.6%	8.0%	12.9%	10.0%	8.4%
<i>Distant</i>	7.0%	6.8%	11.7%	8.9%	9.3%
<i>Remote</i>	8.4%	8.6%	13.6%	11.1%	10.9%
<i>Rest of KY</i>	4.4%	5.7%	10.2%	6.1%	4.5%
<i>USA</i>	6%	4.4%	9.3%	5.6%	4.7%

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In the years before the 2008 recession, unemployment rates in Eastern Kentucky were well above the national average. The decline of the coal industry can certainly be blamed for some of this decline. Between 2002 and 2006, unemployment rates in most parts of the dataset increased. The collapse of blue-collar employment finished earlier in Eastern Kentucky than the rest of the country. While the economic collapse of 2008 may have been a shock in many communities, the writing had been on the wall in Eastern Kentucky for years. Still, the recession hit Eastern Kentucky harder than most parts of the country, with unemployment in the remote set spiking at 13.6 percent, four points above the high 9.3 percent national average in 2010. And, just as the recession arrived with special force in Eastern Kentucky, the recovery proceeded at an exceptionally slow pace. While the United States only endured double-digit unemployment for a brief period of time, the remote rural counties studied still had a 10.9 percent unemployment rate at the end of 2016. Eastern Kentucky recovered from the recession later than the rest of the country and did so at a slower pace. In many ways, the economic recovery is only picking up steam in Eastern Kentucky now, something that will likely only enhance President Trump’s standing in the area.

The next factor I consider are child poverty rates. For this measurement, I took the average rate of child poverty between 2009 and 2015, the years considered in this project’s review of school districts. Table 6.13 outlines the rate of child poverty, the rate of children living in deep poverty, and rate of children living in high poverty areas. Deep poverty indicates that a child is living in a household where income levels are a further fifty percent under the federal poverty line.

Table 6.13: Statistics Related to Child Poverty, 2011-2015

Area Studied	Child Poverty Rate	Deep Child Poverty Rate	Children Living in High Poverty Areas
Dataset	39.69%	19.14%	84.79%
<i>Fringe</i>	38.58%	16.69%	72.98%
<i>Distant</i>	38.36%	18.35%	84.71%
<i>Remote</i>	43.23%	24.18%	98.66%
<i>Rest of KY</i>	24.32%	11.14%	35.72%
United States	22%		

As the unemployment numbers in Table 6.13 would suggest, the remote rural counties are home to egregious rates of child poverty. While some may point to the third metric, the percentage of children in a county living in a high poverty area as a given, it brings two useful conclusions. First, even in counties where poverty is high, there are often pockets of either wealth or a group of people in the middle class. However, there are barely any pockets of prosperity in the counties studied, with a small pocket of Letcher County (a part of Whitesburg) being the only exception. Additionally, as Robert Putnam found in *Our Kids*, the greatest predictor of student success is not the socioeconomic status of the student but rather the socioeconomic status of a student’s peers (Putnam, 2015). The lack of any pockets of socioeconomic prosperity leaves every child in the remote set within the clutches of a vicious cycle of poverty.

Crystallizing Analysis of Starting Line Factors:

In all three of the “starting-line” factors studied, students who attend schools in the remote rural part of the dataset are victims to structural inequalities out of their control that leave

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them disadvantaged relative both to their in-state and national peers. Within the field of public health, in every single factor examined from flu shot reception to youth disability, the remote rural counties were distantly behind their competitors. The results on matters of child development and economic development were no different. The clear result of this analysis is the expectation that students in the dataset will be educationally behind their peers by the time they are tested in fourth grade, with the vast majority of these school districts being classified as “low opportunity” school districts.

A Focus on the Fourth Grade: Measuring Against the Average at the Starting Line

In my methodology chapter, I argued that fourth grade testing averages are best utilized as a point of embarkation from which we can measure how educational opportunity can be maximized. Fourth-grade test scores are an incredibly useful tool to show a school district what they are working with in terms of student achievement. I will measure the testing results of schools in the dataset against four points of comparison: the national average, the average of Appalachian schools, the Kentucky state average, and the average of other Kentucky rural schools. For these findings, I will use the average of Kentucky state test scores from 2009-2015 and the average NAEP scores from those years (2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015). The use of an average for fourth grade test scores moves to limit the effect of an extreme year, something that will provide especially useful in analyzing district-level improvements and regressions. Table 6.14 provides an analysis of the entire dataset’s performance in reading. Table 6.15 narrows the focus to rural remote schools in the dataset in reading.

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Table 6.14: 4th Grade Reading, Full Dataset Comparison, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Dataset NAEP Estimate, 2009-2015	221.8 points (Basic Level)
Difference with National Average	+1.3 points
Difference with Appalachian Average	+2.2 points
Difference with Kentucky State Average	-4.0 points
Difference with Kentucky Rural Average	-4.0 points
Difference with NAEP “Proficient”	-16.6 points

Table 6.15: 4th Grade Reading, Remote Set Comparison, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Remote Set NAEP Estimate, 2009-2015	219.7 points (Basic Level)
Difference with National Average	-0.8 points
Difference with Appalachian Average	+0.1 points
Difference with Kentucky State Average	-6.1 points
Difference with Kentucky Rural Average	-6.1 points
Difference with NAEP “Proficient”	-12.4 points

On first glance, the average reading scores in Eastern Kentucky for the full dataset do not look terrible when compared to national averages. The students in the full dataset outperform the average national and Appalachian fourth grade student in reading. However, students in the remote set are barely on par with their Appalachian peers and already behind the national average. Both the entire set and the remote rural set fall significantly behind their in-state peers, with the remote set being a staggering six points back. In this case, these results present an

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interesting conundrum: while the presence of “mitigating factors” might not appear on a national or regional scale, within the state of Kentucky, the disparities between schools in the coalfields are starting far behind in reading achievement. Furthermore, a comparison to NAEP Proficiency standards provides an even more blistering indictment of student performance in these sets. The proximity of scores to national averages does not give schools in the dataset a pass for their performance in fourth grade reading.

The other main component of the NAEP is mathematics testing. Table 6.16 compares the average NAEP from 2009-2015 in the dataset to the same comparative units - national, Appalachia, Kentucky state, and Kentucky Rural - used in Tables 6.14 and 6.15. Table 6.17 replicates that effect with the students in the rural remote dataset.

Table 6.16: 4th Grade Math, Full Dataset Comparison, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Dataset NAEP Estimate, 2009-2015	237.9 points (Basic Level)
Difference with National Average	-2.4 points
Difference with Appalachian Average	-.9 points
Difference with Kentucky State Average	-2.9 points
Difference with Kentucky Rural Average	-3.4 points
Difference with NAEP “Proficient”	-11.1 points

Table 6.17: 4th Grade Math, Remote Set Comparison, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Remote Set NAEP Estimate, 2009-2015	236.6 points (Basic Level)
Difference with National Average	-3.7 points

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Difference with Appalachian Average	-2.3 points
Difference with Kentucky State Average	-4.2 points
Difference with Kentucky Rural Average	-4.7 points
Difference with NAEP “Proficient”	-12.4 points

The results of dataset students on their fourth grade reading exams were mixed; students were on par with national and regional averages but significantly behind their in-state peers. Mathematics scores present a different story. Tables 6.16 and 6.17 demonstrate that schools in the full dataset and remote rural dataset are behind in every unit of comparison used in this project. Table 6.18 highlights how the full dataset and remote set performed against the ten benchmarks it faced, five on reading performance and five on math performance.

Table 6.18: 4th Grade, Average Performance of Sets to Benchmarks, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Set	Benchmarks Met
Full Dataset Performance	2 of 10 benchmarks met
Remote Rural Set Performance Set	1 of 10 benchmarks met

As the results examined earlier predicted, starting line factors proved predictive of a set of schools that as a whole would meet the “low opportunity” designation. Table 6.19 breaks down how individual school districts fall.

Table 5.19: Remote Rural Schools by Opportunity Status in Model of Educational Opportunity

<i>Theory of Change</i>	Opportunity		
	<i>Light Starting-Line Inequalities (7 to 10 4th grade benchmarks)</i>	<i>Average Starting Line Inequalities (4 to 6 of 4th grade benchmarks)</i>	<i>Heavy Starting-Line Inequalities (0 to 3 of 4th grade benchmarks)</i>
School District Placement in Category	Morgan County	Knott County Magoffin County	Elliott County Jackson County Letcher County Lee County Martin County Menifee County McCreary County Owsley County Wolfe County

In total, nine of the twelve remote rural school districts are designated “low opportunity” school districts. As predicted earlier, the remote rural school districts in Eastern Kentucky find themselves vastly unequal at the starting line. Now, it remains to be seen how effectively institutions of government help students catch-up educationally.

Chapter 7: Unequal in Mitigating Ability: No Recovery by Eighth Grade

Chapter Overview:

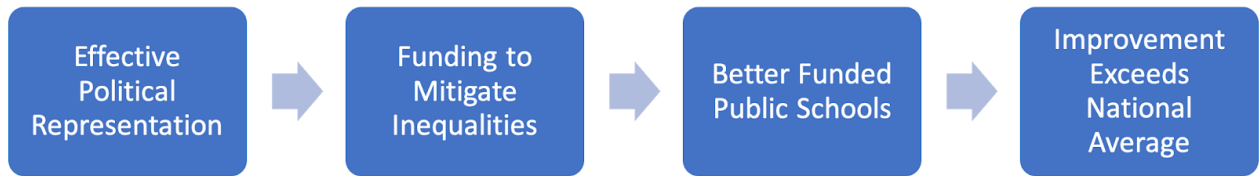
This chapter will outline how well starting line inequalities in Eastern Kentucky are mitigated on a macro level. Here, I will measure well how institutions as a whole mitigate inequalities in the remote rural set. Three key factors will be evaluated: political representation, school financing, and the extent of educational improvement. The specific factors of this study were previously outlined in Table 3.5 which is copied again below.

Table 3.5: Factors Considered in Mitigating Variables

Category	Variables Included
Political Representation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Representatives Per District Over Time (Federal, State, and Local)2. Voting Participation & Behavior3. Representatives Serving on key Legislative Committees
School Finance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Federal Funding2. State Funding3. Local Funding
School Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. District NAEP Equivalent vs. National, Regional, State, and Geographic Peers & NAEP Proficiency (4th and 8th Grade)2. District NAEP Improvement vs. National, Regional, State, and Geographic Peers & NAEP “Proficient vs. Proficient” (8th Grade Only)

Through a study of these variables, I expect to see my theory of mitigation, first listed in Figure 3.1, at work in this chapter.

Figure 3.1: Theory of Mitigation



The question of how responsive institutions of government are to the remote rural counties as a whole will be considered. However, the role of specific layers of government will be saved for Chapters Eight through Ten. Based on the strength of political representation and school funding, I will offer a projection of where this set of schools falls in the “rising, average, or regressing” ranges. This will enable us the chance to estimate where these school districts would fall within the Model of Educational Opportunity.

Next, student performance in eighth grade by students in the districts studied will be considered, weighted, and presented. Eighth grade scores will be measured against two sets of benchmarks: first, the scores will be measured against the same performance benchmarks used in Chapter Six; additionally, the scores will also be measured against their peers for rates of student improvement between fourth and eighth grade. This will enable us to fully diagnose the remote set and the school districts in it as rising, average, or regressing. At the end of the chapter, I will first place individual school districts in the rising, average, or regressing spectrum before assigning them their respective status and category within the complete Model of Educational Opportunity. This will set up the further studies of political responsiveness at the federal, state, and local level.

Political Representation Overview:

Political scientists Sidney Verba, Nancy Burns, and Kay Schlozman have observed that Americans take as a given that economic inequalities exist (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman, 2003). However, the authors found that Americans have different expectations when it comes to political equality. Here, Americans tend to react with protest that there are inequalities in political participation and responsiveness (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman, 2003). The Supreme Court’s ruling in *Citizens United v. The Federal Elections Commission* has only made voice more unequal and more related to personal socioeconomic status (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman, 2018). However, these inequalities, especially in political voice, exist and are magnified for people of lower educational attainment and socioeconomic status.

The study of voice in rural communities has only recently begun to enter the political science literature, specifically in Kathy Cramer’s *The Politics of Resentment*, which studied rural consciousness in rural Wisconsin. I promised to study three key elements of voice: voting behavior and political participation, representatives per district over time, and representatives serving on what I term “key committees,” which vary as to which level of government we are analyzing.

Mitigating Factor 1-A: Gross Political Representation

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Five, a key factor in the study of rural communities are the Supreme Court rulings *Baker v. Carr* and *Reynolds v. Sims*. For decades, rural districts were drastically overrepresented compared to their urban and suburban peers. These court rulings forced the redrawing of districts at the federal and state level. Additionally, the decline in the percentage of Americans living in rural areas has further decreased rural America’s

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representation in state legislatures and the halls of Congress. In 1953, 53 million Americans, or 36 percent of the country lived in a rural area (PRB, 2003). Today, only around 20 percent of Americans live in a rural area (Ajilore and Willingham, 2019).

In Kentucky, the population of folks living in the coalfield has dropped dramatically since 1950. Table 7.1 measures this decline for the entire dataset. Table 7.2 specifies these trends for the remote rural school districts.

Table 7.1, Population Trends in Dataset (United States Census Bureau, 1995 and 2018)

Year	Total People	Percentage of State	Region’s Population Decline from '50
1950	605629	20.22%	N/A
1990	509255	13.91%	-15.91%
2018	472240	10.57%	-22.02%

Table 7.2, Population Trends in Remote Rural Set (United States Census Bureau, 1995 and 2018)

Year	Total People	Percentage of State Population	Population Decline from '50
1950	163782	5.47%	N/A
1990	140213	3.83%	-14.39%
2018	137456	3.08%	-16.07%

Both tables present two different conundrums of political representation in Eastern Kentucky that will be evaluated in the next two chapters. First, Eastern Kentucky’s federal representation in the United States House of Representatives would be likely to decline. This trend is best exemplified by the trends explored in Table 7.1. Representation in the US House is

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awarded on a state-by-state basis based off of gross population. Now, as the overall US population has expanded since the 1950s and the amount of seats in the US House of Representatives has not, the amount of seats vested in Eastern Kentucky should be smaller. In Chapter Seven, I will trace Eastern Kentucky’s federal representation over time.

Additionally, as Table 7.2 indicates, the proportion of the state population living in remote rural counties in the coalfield is also noticeably smaller. This will have major implications for the amount of seats these counties have in the Kentucky State Legislature. States in the Kentucky state legislature are awarded proportionally based on state population for both the Kentucky State Senate and the Kentucky State House. Chapter Nine will expand on the implications of this in Eastern Kentucky, with an eye towards examining other population changes that have occurred in the region. However, as a whole, I would diagnose the entire dataset as possessing weaker mitigating structures in gross political representation over time due to their declining share of the state population.

Mitigating Factor 1-B: Voting Behavior & Political Participation

Schlozman, Brady, and Verba suggest that one of the critical ways for a community to exercise voice is voting (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, 2018). As a whole, Eastern Kentucky votes at a rate far below the national average. The Kentucky Secretary of State’s office does not make available voter turnout data in the form of turnout by “voting eligible population” which is considered the gold standard in political participation. However, they do make data available in terms of how many registered voters turned out. Table 7.3 displays these patterns in the area studied.

Table 7.3, Registered Voter Turnout, 2012-2016 (Turnout, n.d.; DeSilver, 2018)

Variable Considered	Registered Voter Turnout, 2016	Registered Voter Turnout, 2012
United States	86.80%	82.21%
Kentucky	59.10%	59.70%
Full Dataset	52.60%	51.60%
Remote Rural Set	53.10%	51.31%

Notably, all four of these metrics would be lower if we were to consider turnout of the “voting eligible population” instead of the “registered voter” population. US numbers would drop to around 60 percent in both elections and the results for Kentucky and the dataset would drop even more.

Two main conclusions can be taken from Table 7.3. The first is a slight uptick in registered voter turnout in Eastern Kentucky, especially in the remote rural counties between 2012 and 2016. An analysis of many rural communities would likely indicate that upticks like this were helpful in President Trump’s election. By running up the score in rural parts of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin that are analogous to Eastern Kentucky was essential to Trump’s election. Additionally, and more importantly, rates of voter turnout were substantially lower than state and national averages, even with the “Trump bump” in the area. An area with lower voter turnout rates is highly indicative of an area likely to have lower voter turnout rates. However, fluctuations exist between turnout rates by county, which provide an insight into disparities in political voice, even among areas experiencing high rates of poverty.

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Mitigating Factor 1-C: Legislators on Key Committees

There is more to political representation than sheer force in numbers. Any student of bureaucracy would be quick to point out to the role of legislative committees. Woodrow Wilson once pointed out that “Congress in session is Congress on public exhibition, whilst Congress in its committee rooms is Congress at work” (Gaines, et al, 2019). The nature of committee work in Congress is that it provides committee chairs and members with access to pork barrel funds in their area of jurisdiction. Having your representative on the Kentucky Education Committee is a critical way to shape testing policies in a way which positively influences your district. Having a member on the Appropriations Committee, specifically a subcommittee dealing with the education budget, may be even more helpful. Consequently, I will look at the committee assignments of Eastern Kentucky’s representatives at the federal and state level in each of the two subsequent chapters. Table 7.4 lists what I term to be the major committees and organizations at play at the state and federal level.

Table 7.4, “Key Committees” Evaluated

Area Studied	Committees/Institutions
Federal Level	Appalachia Regional Commission House Committee on Appropriations House Committee on Education & Labor Senate Committee on Appropriations Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
State Level	House Subcommittee on Appropriations for Primary & Secondary Education House Committee on Education Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations for Education Senate Committee on Education

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I argue that representation on these committees is critical to evaluating the extent to which a school is able to mitigate inequalities at the starting line. A critical consideration in rural America, however, is not just the question of “who speaks” but how the people who speak are spread out. Given the size of some of these communities, one state senator could represent several counties, making them potentially less effective in advocating for some of their communities. Concurrently, when I analyze representation on “key committees,” I will account for both voice and where those voices are spread out.

Mitigating Factor II: Public Assistance - School Funding

The financial opportunities afforded to America’s public schools are inherently unequal. Schools are funded through funds from federal, state, and local sources of government. Generally, lower-income school districts qualify for more aid from federal and state funding sources. However, despite federal and state assistance, these districts generally are forced to spend far less per pupil than school districts that are better off. Most funds for school funding come through the property tax. In places like McCreary County, where the child poverty rate is over 50 percent, the school district will not likely have the tax base necessary to collect the same amount of local funds of a wealthy suburban competitor (Census Bureau). Wealthy school districts can raise so much off of property taxes that they are able to spend far more per pupil than low-income districts despite the fact that low-income school districts receive more federal and state support. In each of the chapters on the separate branches of government, I will study the extent of funding the schools receive from each branch of government and evaluate the adequacy in which schools are funded on each level. Table 76.5 provides a baseline analysis of how Eastern Kentucky’s schools are funded.

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Table 7.5, Funding Levels of Dataset Schools, Fiscal Year 2017 (NCES, 2019)

Variable	Federal	State	Local
Rest of United States	\$986	\$5,477	\$5,820
Rest of Kentucky	\$1,084	\$5,305	\$3,602
Full Dataset	\$1,822.14	\$7,440	\$1,927.72
Remote Set	\$2,036.13	\$7,959	\$1,794.34

Table 7.6, Funding Ratio of Dataset Schools, Fiscal Year 2017 (NCES, 2019)

Variable	Federal	State	Local
Rest of United States	8.07%	44.79%	47.60%
Rest of Kentucky	10.87%	53.20%	36.13%
Full Dataset	16.04%	65.51%	16.97%
Remote Set	17.27%	67.51%	15.22%

As Table 6.6 demonstrates, schools in Eastern Kentucky are far more dependent on the state and federal government to fund their school districts. Such a trend is indicative of two key factors: first, the struggles of these communities to generate their own sources of revenue; second, a dependence on federal and state institutions to provide the economic resources needed to sustain public education. Table 6.7 breaks down per pupil spending by category. In this chart, I moved to exclude Magoffin County’s funding data and will continue to do so in subsequent chapters. I made this decision as it was not possible to distinguish how much of the district’s funding was for the school district’s \$18 million construction project versus the \$22 million Magoffin spends on instructional and student needs (NCES, 2019).

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Table 7.7, Per Pupil Spending by Category, FY 2017 (NCES, 2019)

Variable	Total	Federal	State	Local
United States	\$12,202	\$976	\$5,478	\$5,457
Kentucky	\$10,121	\$1,164	\$5,536	\$3,421
Full Dataset	\$11,357	\$1822	\$7,440	\$1,928
Remote Set	\$11,790	\$2,036	\$7,959	\$1,794

Even as we break down funding levels at the federal, state, and local levels in chapters to come, it is important to look at school funding data in an aggregate sense. While Eastern Kentucky’s schools receive more per-pupil than the Kentucky average, large parts of that are due to Title I funds, the Rural and Low Income School (RILS) program, and state funding formulas that attempt to make up for the shortfall in revenues available on the local level. However, it is critical to note that within the remote set, disparities exist between districts that are able to finance more on their own. As Chapter Ten will highlight, these disparities are reflected in school performance and categorization.

Review of Mitigating Factors:

The analysis of voter turnout, popular representation, and school funding earlier in this chapter are suggestive of an area with poor political voice and a lack of economic firepower to fund schools at the local level. Such findings suggest that most school districts in Eastern Kentucky will lack the ability to effectively mitigate the inequalities at the starting-line, which were measured in Chapter Six. I predict that analysis of eighth grade test scores for both

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proficiency and improvement will show that schools in the Eastern Kentucky coalfield, especially those in remote rural areas, will experience further inequalities in harm mitigation.

Mitigating Factor I: School Effectiveness - Accounting for Proficiency and Improvement

The analysis of how eighth grade test scores in the dataset stack up will rely on a multi-pronged approach. First, like in the analysis of fourth grade scores, I will compare how schools in the full dataset and the remote set perform on standardized tests to their national, Appalachia regional, Kentucky state, and Kentucky rural counterparts. Additionally, I will measure student improvement between the eighth and fourth grades, using the same units of comparison as I used to measure proficiency. As stipulated in my methods chapter, measuring improvement levels is a way to identify a high-quality school that makes up for heavy starting-line factors that hold students back in fourth grade scores. Table 7.8 measures eighth grade reading performance for the entire dataset. Table 7.9 measures improvement for the entire dataset in reading, subtracting average fourth grade NAEP scores from fourth graders in 2009, 2010, and 2011 from those same students’ average eighth grade scores in 2013, 2014, and 2015. In Tables 7.8, 7.10, 7.12, and 7.14, I utilize a variable called “Proficient to Proficient,” which measures the improvement needed for a school at the lowest level counting for proficiency to remain at the lowest level of proficiency, assisting us in finding where students fall off the proficiency track.

Table 7.8: 8th Grade Reading, Dataset Comparison, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Dataset NAEP Estimate, 2009-2015	264.4 points (Basic Level)
Difference with National Average	+ 0.4 points

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Difference with Appalachian Average	+2.6 points
Difference with Kentucky State Average	-1.3 points
Difference with Kentucky Rural Average	-5.3 points
Difference with NAEP “Proficient”	-16.6 points

Table 7.9: 8th Grade Reading, Dataset Improvement Comparison, 2013-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Dataset NAEP Improvement, 2013-2015	43.8 point gain
Improvement vs. National	-1.2 point loss
Improvement vs. Appalachia	-1.7 point loss
Improvement vs. Kentucky State	+0.3 point gain
Improvement vs. Kentucky Rural	-1.7 point loss
Improvement vs. “Proficient to Proficient”	+0.8 point gain

As a whole, eighth grade reading scores in the dataset provided far less to brag about than the fourth grade test scores. Reading scores regressed when compared to schools nationally, across Appalachia, and other rural Kentucky schools. The only area where reading scores improved was against the Kentucky state average. However, such improvements were small - a gain of 0.3 points against the state average - and only made up under a quarter of the achievement gap between the dataset and the state average. While the “proficient to proficient” range showed a net gain, also of 0.8 points against what was needed, the dataset’s position in the lower-middle of the NAEP Basic Range was unchanged.

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Tables 7.10 and 7.11 replicate the same effect, albeit for the remote rural schools in the set. Once again, the schools in the rural remote of the dataset fall further behind, both in terms of their status versus comparative benchmarks and in relative improvement.

Table 7.10: 8th Grade Reading, Remote Set Comparison, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Remote Set NAEP Estimate, 2009-2015	259.7 points (Basic Level)
Difference with National Average	-4.3 points
Difference with Appalachian Average	-2.1 points
Difference with Kentucky State Average	-6.0 points
Difference with Kentucky Rural Average	-10.0 points
Difference with NAEP “Proficient”	-21.3 points

Table 7.11: 8th Grade Reading, Remote Set Improvement, 2013-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Remote Set NAEP Improvement, 2013-2015	43.3 point gain
Improvement vs. National	-1.7 point loss
Improvement vs. Appalachia	-2.2 point loss
Improvement vs. Kentucky State	-0.2 point loss
Improvement vs. Kentucky Rural	-2.2 point loss
Improvement vs. “Proficient to Proficient”	+0.3 point gain

In all but one of the fourth grade reading measurements (the remote set was basically tied with the Appalachia average), the districts in the remote set tested behind their national and regional peers. What is striking about the eighth grade results is that the students in the remote set fell

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farther behind in every comparative category, with the exception of “proficient to proficient.”

Nonetheless, the gains in “proficient to proficient” are relatively insignificant, as they largely just show that the school districts in the remote set occupy the same part of the “NAEP Basic” range as they did in fourth grade. Schools in the remote set are starting behind in fourth grade and falling farther behind by eighth grade.

As was the case with fourth grade math scores in the dataset, eighth grade math scores do not paint a picture of a strong school system. Tables 7.12 and 7.13 demonstrate these trends in the full dataset.

Table 7.12: Eighth Grade Math, Dataset Comparison, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Dataset NAEP Estimate, 2009-2015	276.6 points (Basic Level)
Difference with National Average	-5.9 points
Difference with Appalachian Average	-2.1 points
Difference with Kentucky State Average	-3.4 points
Difference with Kentucky Rural Average	-3.4 points
Difference with NAEP “Proficient”	-22.4 points

Table 7.13: Eighth Grade Math, Dataset Improvement, 2013-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Dataset NAEP Improvement, 2013-2015	36.3 point gain
Improvement vs. National	-6.7 point loss
Improvement vs. Appalachia	-5.5 point loss
Improvement vs. Kentucky State	-3.2 point loss
Improvement vs. Kentucky Rural	-1.7 point loss
Improvement vs. “Proficient to Proficient”	-13.7 point loss

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The standard school in the dataset began between 1 and 3.5 points below each of the first four units of comparison. In each category, by the time these students reached eighth grade fell even farther behind. Tables 7.14 and 7.15 demonstrate that this trend is even stronger in the rural remote schools in the dataset.

Table 7.14: Eighth Grade Math, Remote Set Comparison, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Remote Set NAEP Estimate, 2009-2015	272.2 points (Basic Level)
Difference with National Average	-10.3 points
Difference with Appalachian Average	-6.5 points
Difference with Kentucky State Average	-7.8 points
Difference with Kentucky Rural Average	-7.8 points
Difference with NAEP “Proficient”	-26.8 points

Table 7.15: Eighth Grade Math, Remote Set Improvement, 2013-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Variable	Result
Remote Set NAEP Improvement, 2013-2015	33.8 point gain
Improvement vs. National	-9.2 point loss
Improvement vs. Appalachia	-8.1 point loss
Improvement vs. Kentucky State	-5.7 point loss
Improvement vs. Kentucky Rural	-4.2 point loss
Improvement vs. “Proficient to Proficient”	-16.2 point loss

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As was found in an evaluation of remote set reading scores, schools in the remote set started below the national average in fourth grade math and improved below the national average to fall even further behind by eighth grade. Remote rural schools in the set start farther behind and fall farther behind their fringe rural and distant rural counterparts. Table 7.16 measures overall school district performance against the benchmarks provided, first by overall performance and second by improvement.

Table 7.16: 8th Grade, Average Performance of Sets to Benchmarks, 2009-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Set	Benchmarks Met
Full Dataset Performance	2 of 10 benchmarks met
Full Dataset Improvement	2 of 10 benchmarks met
Remote Rural Set Performance	0 of 10 benchmarks met
Remote Rural Set Improvement	1 of 10 benchmarks met

As the results examined earlier predicted, the analysis of mitigating factors were predictive of a set of schools that as a whole would meet the “regressing” designation. Table 7.17 breaks down how individual school districts fall.

Table 6.17: Eighth Grade Math, Remote Set Improvement, 2013-2015 (Reardon, et al, 2019)

<i>Theory of Change</i>	<i>School District Placement in Category</i>
<i>Strong Mitigating Structures (13 to 20 of 8th Grade benchmarks)</i>	Letcher County
<i>Average Mitigating Structures (7 to 12 of 8th Grade benchmarks)</i>	Elliott County Knott County Lee County
<i>Weak Mitigating Structures (0 to 5 of 8th grade benchmarks)</i>	Jackson County Magoffin County Martin County McCreary County Menifee County Morgan County Owsley County Wolfe County

In total, eight of the twelve school districts studied have low mitigating abilities. Only in Letcher County are successful mechanisms in place which have enhanced student improvement.

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Now that school districts have been measured for inequalities at the starting-line and inequalities of mitigation, the school districts can be fully placed in the Model of Educational Opportunity. Table 7.18 details where schools fall within the model. Table 7.19 places the schools within the five placement categories available.

Table 7.18, Remote Set Placement in Model of Educational Opportunity (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Rising, High Opportunity (0): No Districts	Average, High Opportunity (0): No Districts	Regressing, High Opportunity (1): Morgan County
Rising, Medium Opportunity (0): No Districts	Average, Medium Opportunity (1): Knott County	Regressing, Medium Opportunity (1): Magoffin County
Rising, Low Opportunity (1): Letcher County	Average, Low Opportunity (1): Elliott County Lee County	Regressing, Low Opportunity (6): Jackson County Martin County McCreary County Menifee County Owsley County Wolfe County

Table 7.19, Category Placement in Model of Educational Opportunity (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Category	School Districts in Category
Category I: High Opportunity & Rising	None
Category II: High Opportunity & Average Improvement <i>or</i> Average Opportunity & High Improvement	None

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Category III: High Opportunity & Regressing <i>or</i> Medium Opportunity & Average Improvement <i>or</i> Low Opportunity & High Improvement	Knott County Letcher County Morgan County
Category IV: Average Opportunity & Regressing <i>or</i> Low Opportunity & Average Improvement	Elliott County Lee County Magoffin County
Category V: Low Opportunity & Regressing	Jackson County Martin County McCreary County Menifee County Owsley County Wolfe County

As a whole, Eastern Kentucky’s remote rural schools are in need of both a helping hand and an extended study. Critically, disparities exist even between lower-income schools in the region. Letcher County’s schools improve twenty-five units more than schools in similarly remote rural McCreary County. These disparities are what we bring into focus in Chapters Eight through Ten, using these categorizations as a way to further examine the role of institutions in the inequality of Eastern Kentucky’s schools.

Chapter 8: “A Just, Limited, Federal Government”: An Analysis of the Federal Role

Chapter Overview:

Alexander Hamilton wrote about the new American federal republic that, “it’s not tyranny we desire; it’s a just, limited, federal government” (Hamilton, n.d.). As Chapter Four emphasized, the extent of how “limited” the federal government is has varied across history and area of policy. However, in an era in which the federal government has had greater influence over public education, the role of the federal government merits close examination. This chapter will pay specific attention to how the federal government has responded to inequities in education in the remote rural school districts studied. In my analysis, I take into account that the role of the federal government is double-edged. On one hand, the federal government holds the most power to create nationwide changes in public health, economic development, and educational growth. However, on the other hand, the federal government as a whole is the most distant from the needs of Eastern Kentucky. Weighing these two facts in conjunction is critical to analyze the effectiveness of the federal role in Eastern Kentucky.

In this Chapter, as well as Chapters Nine and Ten, I will follow an identical structure. Each of these chapters will begin with a study of representation. Within this part of the chapters, I will examine who represents Eastern Kentucky at each level of government, who speaks to these representatives with their political voice, and how well positioned those elected representatives are to listen to their constituents. As these chapters evaluate how well different levels of government respond to the needs of underresourced remote, rural schools, I believe it

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critical to start each chapter by detailing the nature of the government responding to these needy school districts. After providing an assessment on the quality of the representation Eastern Kentucky enjoys at each level of government, I will then assess levels of school finance and correlations to school performance. As noted earlier, a truly “responsive” government would be successful in mitigating the inequalities faced by fourth-graders by producing fourth to eighth grade score increases higher than than nation

Overview of Political Representation from the Federal Government:

This section will give a brief overview of who represents Eastern Kentucky at each level of government to provide background on how “responsiveness” will be evaluated. I will begin this chapter with a brief discussion of dominant theories regarding federal responsiveness. Then, I will attempt to answer three key questions which comprise the nature of Eastern Kentucky’s political representation. First, who represents Eastern Kentucky on the federal level? Second, who speaks politically to these representatives? Finally, how well positioned are Eastern Kentucky’s representatives to listen to the political concerns they do hear? Answering these questions is critical to form the understanding to evaluate how responsive the federal government is when taking into account the resources the federal government has to offer.

Theories of Federal Responsiveness:

In *Unequal Democracy*, Larry Bartels finds that at the federal level, some institutions are more responsive than others (Bartels, 2018). In both the House of Representatives and the Senate, legislators are the most responsive to higher income constituents and least responsive to low-income constituents (Bartels, 2018). However, data from the 112th Congress that Bartels analyzed demonstrated that, on a scale, Senators are incredibly responsive to high-income

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constituents, even more so than in the House; the amount of responsiveness to concerns of low-income constituents barely even registers on the scale that Bartels uses (Bartels, 2018).

The relationship between socioeconomic status and political voice is one often studied in the political science literature. In *Unequal and Unrepresented*, Kay Scholzman, Henry Brady, and Sidney Verba found that while they were unable to empirically determine a relationship between socioeconomic status and political responsiveness, they found that on a case-by-case basis, there are hardly any examples where having socioeconomic resources hurt the effort of an individual or campaign (Scholzman, Verba, and Brady, 2018).

Ten of the twelve remote rural counties (all except Wolfe County) are in Kentucky’s Fifth Congressional District. The Kentucky Fifth, as of 2017, is the third poorest Congressional District in the United States, with a poverty rate surpassing 29 percent (FRAC, 2019). Notably, in the remote counties studied, as Table 8.1 demonstrates, the rate of poverty is even higher.

Table 8.1, Average Rate of Poverty in 5th Congressional District, 2009-2018

Area	Population	Poverty Level
Remote Rural Counties	117,748	31.20%
Rest of 5th Congressional District	558,622	27.57%

In the Fifth Congressional District, the question of “who speaks” is more nuanced, when much of the district lives in poverty.

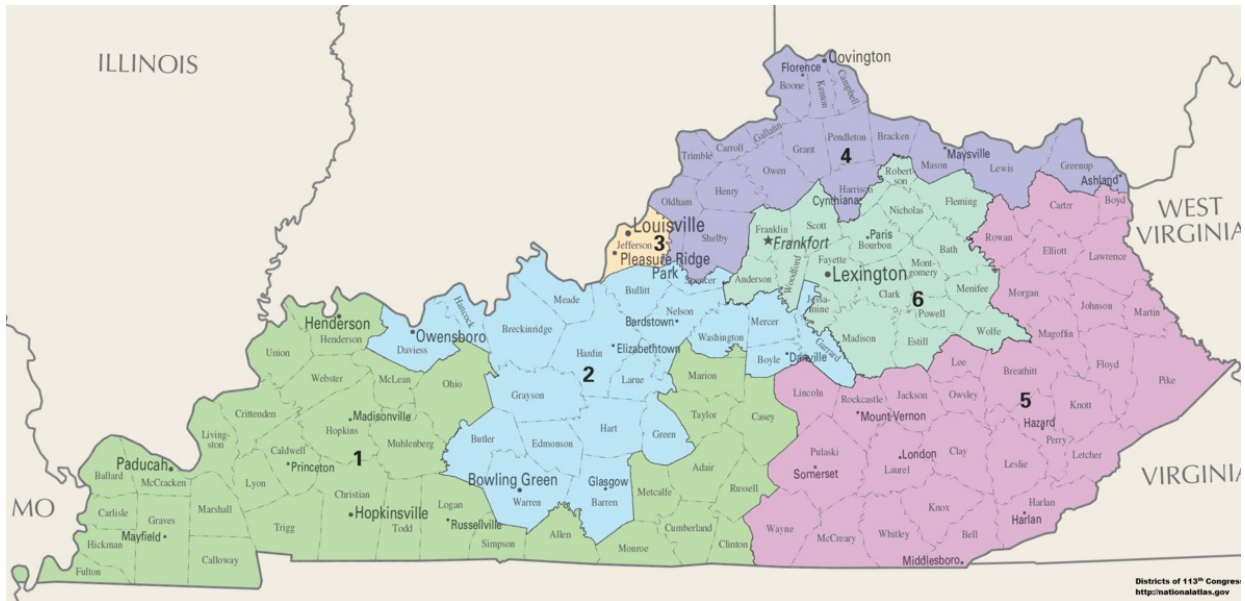
Representation-I: Who Represents Eastern Kentucky Federally?

Eastern Kentucky has enjoyed a remarkable consistency in who its representatives are. The one US House member representing Eastern Kentucky, Hal Rogers, has been responsible for

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the district since 1981. Most of Eastern Kentucky is located within Kentucky’s Fifth Congressional District, with Estill, Menifee, Powell, and Wolfe Counties being located in the Sixth Congressional District, a map of which comprises Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1, Kentucky Congressional District Map, 2013 (Census Bureau, 2013)



Thirty-two counties comprise the Fifth Congressional district. Counties in the full dataset comprise 62.14 percent of the Kentucky Fifth’s total population. The remote rural set specifically makes up 17.41 percent of the Fifth’s population (Census Bureau, 2018). The four dataset counties in the Sixth District, Estill, Menifee, Powell, and Wolfe - only make up a reasonably negligible 5.17 percent of that district’s population (Census Bureau, 2018). Within the Fifth District, the dataset counties - all of whom are classified as economically distressed - make up the majority of the population and should merit sizable federal assistance.

The senior US Senator, Mitch McConnell, has been in office since 1985, with the junior Senator, Rand Paul, having been seated in 2011. As cited in Chapter Seven, the dataset counties make up a shrinking proportion of the state population. As Table 6.2 in the last chapter

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demonstrated, Eastern Kentucky once made up a sizable constituency statewide, totaling over 20 percent of the state population. The region’s notable population decline has rendered the dataset counties a less sizable constituency; the dataset counties only make up slightly more than 10 percent of the state population, with the remote counties comprising just above 3 percent of the state population. Applying the theories of Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, when we consider the lower than average voter participation rates and low socioeconomic status, Eastern Kentucky would likely not be considered the most important constituency to these Senators. Consequently, we should expect poor levels of political representation for Eastern Kentucky from Senators McConnell and Paul.

The final piece to the federal role in Appalachia comes through the Appalachia Regional Commission (ARC). The ARC was a brainchild of President Kennedy and secured thanks to the efforts of President Johnson. Five goals were identified for the ARC: entrepreneurial opportunities, a ready workforce, critical infrastructure, natural and cultural assets, and leadership and community capacity (ARC). No legislator or government office has done more for Eastern Kentucky than the ARC. Since 1965, when the Appalachia Regional Development Act (ARDA) was passed, the ARC has pushed over \$25 billion of investment into Appalachia (SOURCE). ARC investments have helped create over 300,000 jobs since 1965 (Godfrey, 2017). A 2015 assessment of the ARC noted that on one hand, the ARC has been successful in positively impacting the regional economy, an effective support to state and local partners, and brought the Appalachia closer to socioeconomic parity with the country (Poole, et. all, 2015). However, especially in education, health outcomes, and broadband access, Appalachia still lags far behind the rest of the country.

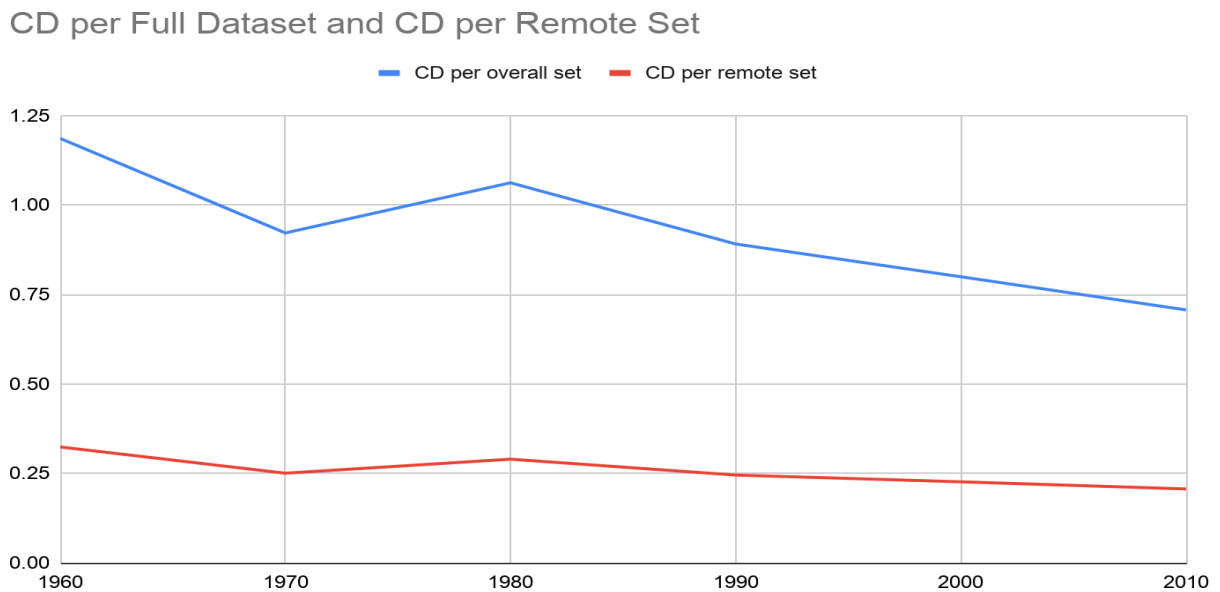
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Understanding who represents Eastern Kentucky is critical background information needed towards analyzing how well Eastern Kentucky is represented at the federal level. The efforts of Hal Rogers in the House, Kentucky’s US Senators, and the Appalachia Regional Commission will be jointly weighted in considering how well or poorly the federal government moves to ameliorate starting-line and mitigating inequalities in the remote rural set.

Representation-II: “Who Speaks” to these Representatives?

Given the decline in population experienced by Eastern Kentucky, the political weight of the region at the federal level has too decreased. Figure 8.2 displays the population of the full dataset and remote rural set counties in terms of how many Congressional districts they comprise by census period.

Figure 8.2, Population Relative to Appropriated Congressional District, 1960-2010



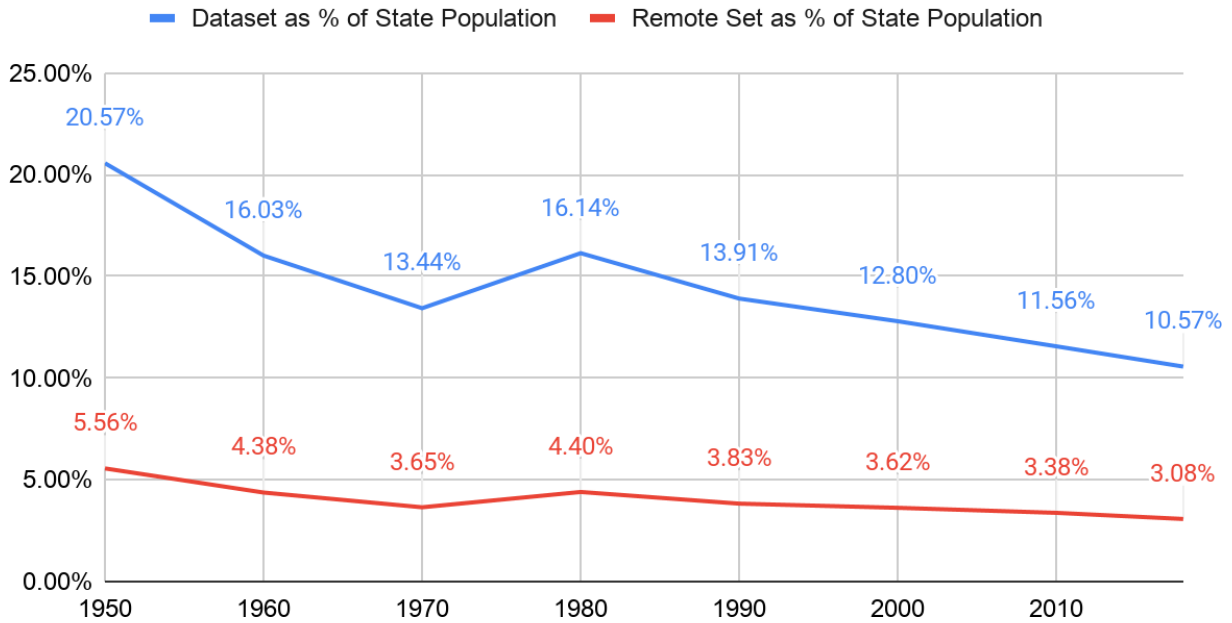
In 1950, the amount of people living in the full dataset amassed the size of 1.81 congressional districts. However, that year was excluded from the graph, as those districts were drawn in the

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era preceding *Baker v. Carr*, where Congressional districts were not drawn according to population size in a way which overwhelmingly advantaged rural areas. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the cumulative power that the citizens of Eastern Kentucky have had in shaping the United States Congress has declined. Figure 8.3 shows the decline of Eastern Kentucky’s proportion of the state’s total population, which shapes how much power the region has in electing its Senators.

Figure 8.3, Dataset & Remote Set Share of State Population, 1950-2018 (Census Bureau, 1995, 2010, 2018)

Share of State Population

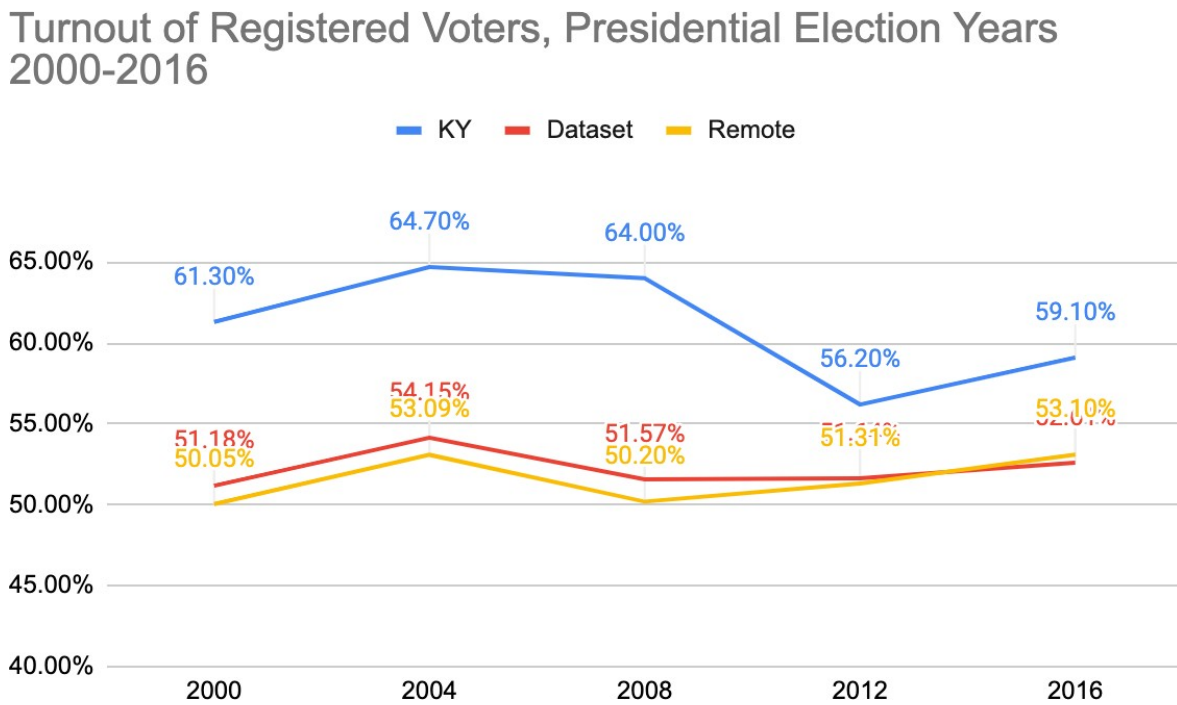


As a whole, the story of political representation in Eastern Kentucky is one of a steady decline over time.

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The way politicians tend to hear a community best is at the ballot box. The act of voting is the freest way to express political voice, costing less money than a campaign contribution and less time than attending a protest (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, 2018). Nonetheless, voting patterns often correlate with socioeconomic status as much as any other way citizens express political voice (Schlozman, Brady, and Verba, 2018). Figure 8.4 displays Eastern Kentucky’s subpar voting turnout.

Figure 8.4, Turnout of Registered Voters, 2000-2016 (Turnout, n.d.)



Two conclusions can be reached from Table 8.4. First, while Kentucky and the dataset counties saw a small “Trump bump” in 2016, it was not substantial. Additionally, we must remember that these statistics only count registered voters that turned out, not the entire voting eligible population. If those numbers were included, we should expect these already low rates of voter

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turnout in the remote set to be even lower. These results, at least on a macro set level, are indicative of a community that would be muffled in the ears of a Congressman and mute in the ears of a United States Senator.

Representation-III: How well positioned are those “Who Listen” to Eastern Kentucky to act on its behalf?

The final key factor of political representation at the state and federal level comes in legislative representation on “key committees.” At the federal level, I defined these committees as House Appropriations, House Education, Senate Appropriations, and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. Seats on these committees are incredibly important. As stressed earlier in this chapter, political action begins when people use political voice. After evaluating who speaks politically, we must turn our attention on the question of “who listens.” A key part in considering who listens politically is analyzing how well positioned those who listen to their constituents are to acting. Legislators on “key committees” related to education have a special propensity to affect change for their constituents’ schools.

At the federal level, Eastern Kentucky is well represented on “key committees,” with representatives for the region covering three out of the four “key committees.” In the House of Representatives, Hal Rogers exercises enormous power as the Senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, which he chaired between 2011 and 2017 (Bade, 2015). For his efforts to secure earmarks for his districts, Rogers was nicknamed the “Prince of Pork” by his congressional colleagues (Bresnahan, 2011). However, the specifics of Rogers’ funding deserves closer scrutiny, with over \$450 million in grants being directed to non-profit organizations directed by Rogers, his family, and former aides (Bresnahan, 2011). Still, Rogers’ influence has

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moved to protect Appalachians, especially when President Trump’s first budget proposed eliminating the ARC (Godfrey, 2017). Rogers organized other legislators in Appalachia, many of them in pro-Trump districts like his, to support continued (and eventually increased) financial support of the ARC.

In the Senate, Mitch McConnell’s seat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, position as Senate Majority Leader, and marriage to Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao has come to Kentucky’s benefit. McConnell has credited some of his more narrow victories to the support he has received from counties in Eastern Kentucky (Bruggers, 2019). Like Trump did nationally, McConnell has been able to run up the score in Eastern Kentucky to offset Democratic strongholds in Louisville and Lexington. As Senate Majority Leader, McConnell enjoys absolute power over setting the Senate’s legislative calendar. This provides McConnell the powers necessary to protect constituent interests in Eastern Kentucky. Additionally, McConnell’s seat on the Senate Appropriations Committee only adds to the resources at McConnell’s disposal. Through his tenure in the Senate, McConnell has secured scores of federal grants and opportunities for Eastern Kentucky, many of which opened federal prisons, created retraining programs for former coal miners, and gained funding for the state’s depleted highway system (WEKU, 2015; Mardis, 2018). Additionally, McConnell used his position to lead a bipartisan effort to safeguard the Rural Educational Achievement Program from Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos’ efforts to defund it (Martin, 2020). Still, at times, the argument can easily be made that McConnell has lost touch with the needs of his Eastern Kentucky constituents and has not used his bully pulpit effectively. Through the years, McConnell has chosen to push to

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reinvigorate the sagging coal mining industry instead of investing in programs meant to spur economic diversification in Eastern Kentucky (Bruggers, 2019).

On an economic level, the federal government does treat Eastern Kentucky well, especially in considering the state’s economic circumstances. Kentucky receives the second highest net federal funding per resident of any state in the country; such metrics are in line with Kentucky having the eight lowest median family income of any state and the seventh highest amount of SNAP recipients of any state (Stebbins, 2019). On average, school districts in Kentucky receive more in overall federal funds and Title I grants than schools outside Kentucky. This is the case both inside and outside the remote set and the overall dataset. However, as with any macro-level economic statistic, the devil is in the details. Those details will be explored in depth in the next section of this chapter.

Finance, Performance, and Overall Assessment Overview:

This section of the chapter will shift the conversation from the makeup and factors affecting the federal role in Eastern Kentucky to evaluating the federal role in action. Here, I will begin with an analysis of school funding, measuring how well schools across the remote set are funded by the federal government. Next, I will evaluate correlations between differences in funding levels and mitigation of starting line inequalities. Finally, I will conclude this section by offering a brief assessment of the federal government’s responsiveness to Eastern Kentucky’s schools.

Finances: How well does the Federal Government fund schools in the Remote Rural Set?

While resentment of the federal government is a commonly held feeling in Eastern Kentucky, the state as a whole, especially school districts in the remote rural set benefit

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tremendously from federal support. Statistically, financial data made available from the National Center for Education Statistics and the Department of Education demonstrates that Eastern Kentucky’s schools are dependent on federal support. Specifically, schools in Eastern Kentucky benefit from two key programs: Title I, Lyndon Johnson’s funding program for low-income students, and the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP). Table 8.2 provides overall per-pupil funding sums on a broader level.

Table 8.2, Federal Funding, FY 2017 (NCES, 2019)

Area	Federal Funding Per Pupil	Overall Per Pupil Funding	Difference from National Average in Federal Funds	Difference from National Average in Overall Funds	% of Overall Funding Coming from Federal Government
Rest of US	\$976	\$12,201	N/A	N/A	8.07%
Rest of KY	\$986	\$12,229	+\$108	-\$2,230	10.87%
Full Dataset	\$1,822	\$11,357	+\$846	-\$844	16.04%
Remote Set	\$2,036	\$11,790	+\$1,060	-\$411	17.27%

A cursory look at those funding levels might make the federal government seem incredibly generous or Eastern Kentucky’s federal representatives seem incredibly effective. This picture presents the idea that funding levels are close to equal in the remote rural set as the standard national school. However, as is often the case with issues of school funding, the devil is always in the details. Table 8.3 displays the levels of support on a per-pupil level that districts receive from Title I and from REAP.

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Table 8.3, Reliance on Federal Grant Programs (Department of Education, n.d., NCES, 2019)

Area	Per Pupil in Title I	Per Pupil from REAP Grants	% of Federal Funding from Title I and REAP Grants
United States	\$244	\$1	25.1%
Rest of Kentucky	\$252	\$21	25.2%
Full Dataset	\$541	\$90	34.6%
Remote Set	\$621	\$101	35.5%

As Table 8.3 demonstrates, Eastern Kentucky’s schools are far more reliant on Title I and REAP than most of their national peers. Table 8.4 displays how well school districts would be funded, both in terms of federal funds and on an overall scope without Title I and REAP.

Table 8.4, Impact of Title I and REAP on Dataset (Department of Education, n.d.; NCES, 2019)

Area	Federal Funding Per Pupil without Title I and REAP	Overall Funding Per Pupil without Title I and REAP	Change in Differential w/Title I and REAP
United States	\$731	\$11,956	N/A
Rest of Kentucky	\$811	\$9,698	-\$28
Full Dataset	\$1,191	\$10,726	-\$386
Remote Set	\$1,314	\$11,067	-\$477

Table 8.4 yields two key conclusions regarding federal funding of schools in the Remote Rural set. First, Table 8.4 demonstrates how critical Title I and REAP grants are to the schools in the remote rural set.

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Additionally, Table 8.4 demonstrates what Title I and REAP grants attempt to do in the first place: even but not equalize the playing field. As stated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I is meant to try to bring forth an “equality of opportunity” (H.R. 10, 89). Title I funds are not meant to fund disadvantaged schools at a level where they would have even greater opportunities than their better endowed peers; while that is something that Lyndon Johnson may have liked, it is something that the budget of the Department of Education cannot afford. Rather, these funds are provided at an extent to which opportunity could become more equal. Title I and REAP funds help pull the remote schools closer to a per-pupil funding level that is in closer alignment with the national average. In this way, the federal role in Eastern Kentucky’s schools succeeds, as federal funds are the area where the remote rural schools make up the most ground to their state and national counterparts. However, even though the federal government’s funding regime has narrowed the gap between remote rural funding levels and that of the average American school, this does not give the federal government a pass on school funding. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, where Title I funding comes from, was passed in 1965. Now, fifty-five years later, school districts in remote rural regions of Eastern Kentucky are still far behind their national peers in performance. While fifty-five years of direct federal aid to schools has helped, the idea that students in these remote rural school districts have the same educational opportunities as do students in the wealthier Kentucky Bluegrass is rightfully considered to be a farce.

School Performance: How have funding levels correlated with mitigation and improvements in school performance?

I ran the school funding data again, this time controlling for what category level a school was in the Model of Educational Opportunity. The categories ranged from Category I (excellent) to Category V (poor) based on each school district’s levels of proficiency and improvement on fourth and eighth grade exams. As documented in Chapter Six, no school districts in the remote rural set are Category I or Category II (above-average) school districts. I have reposted Table 7.17 for easier reference as this section continues.

Table 7.17, Category Placement in Model of Educational Opportunity in Remote Set (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Category	School Districts in Category
Category I: High Opportunity & Rising	None
Category II: High Opportunity & Average Improvement <i>or</i> Average Opportunity & High Improvement	None
Category III: High Opportunity & Regressing <i>or</i> Medium Opportunity & Average Improvement <i>or</i> Low Opportunity & High Improvement	Knott County Letcher County Morgan County
Category IV: Average Opportunity & Regressing <i>or</i> Low Opportunity & Average Improvement	Elliott County Lee County Magoffin County
Category V: Low Opportunity & Regressing	Jackson County Martin County McCreary County Menifee County Owsley County Wolfe County

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Within these categories, I first ran data on overall funding per pupil, federal funding per pupil, and percent of funding coming from federal sources, all of which is broken down in Table 8.5.

Table 8.5, Federal Funding Overview Data by Opportunity Category in Remote Set (NCES, 2019)

Category	Overall Funding Per Pupil	Federal Funding Per Pupil	% of Funding coming from Federal sources
Category III Districts	\$11,840	\$1,830	15.46%
Category IV Districts	\$11,385	\$1,958	17.20%
Category V Districts	\$11,831	\$2,201	18.61%

Two conclusions come from Table 8.5. First, the chart shows that within the remote set, Category III receive the highest amount of per pupil funding. However, I suspect that this trend may be corrected when expanding the sample size weighted and evaluating the full dataset. Still, this trend is more than worth continuing to evaluate. Additionally, this chart shows that, at the federal level, school districts where students face lower educational opportunities receive more funding from the federal government than school districts in the set where educational opportunities are slightly more abundant.

Next, I pulled the overall child poverty rate in each category, Title I funding, and REAP funding, all of which is listed in Table 8.6.

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Table 8.6, Title I and REAP Overview by Opportunity Category in Remote Set (NCES, 2019)

Category	Average Child Poverty Rate in School Districts	Title I Funding Per Pupil	REAP Funding Per Pupil
Category III Districts	39.62%	\$555.28	\$98.29
Category IV Districts	43.62%	\$651	\$110.68
Category V Districts	45.55%	\$663.12	\$101.49

Table 7.6 demonstrates that, within the remote rural set, higher poverty rates coincide with higher levels of federal grant funding and lower levels of educational opportunity. Table 8.7 breaks this issue down further, detailing how much these school districts would receive in federal and overall per-pupil funds without Title I and REAP.

Table 8.7, Further Breakdown of Title I and REAP by Opportunity Category in Remote Set (NCES, 2019)

Category	Total Funding from Title I and REAP	Federal Funding per pupil without Title I and REAP	Overall Funding per pupil without Title I and REAP
Category III Districts	\$653.57	\$1,177	\$11,186
Category IV Districts	\$762	\$1,196	\$10,623
Category V Districts	\$764.61	\$1,437	\$11,066

Two conclusions can be supported about school finance and effectiveness from this data. First, the data underscores how reliant the struggling Category V school districts are on federal funds. As Table 8.5 shows, Category V districts do receive far higher levels of federal aid per-pupil than

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Category III or even Category IV school districts. However, much of those funds are tied in formula grants that make these districts appear more financially competitive with their peers.

Furthermore, once Title I and REAP funds are subtracted, Category V schools receive less per pupil than their Category III and Category IV counterparts. Critically, this does not suggest a shortfall on behalf of the federal government’s part. Rather, this data suggests potential funding short gaps in state and local assistance to these districts, which will be considered later in this work.

Now, when broken down into their respective subcategories, the remote rural set does constitute a small sample size. Only weighting two or three school districts in a subcategory could obstruct the truth if these findings are not reflected on a larger scale. Consequently, I moved to run the data with Category III, IV, and V school districts within the full dataset.

Table 8.8 lists how the full dataset breaks down on a categorical level. Then, Table 8.9 provides information on federal funds per pupil, overall funds per pupil, Title I funds, and REAP funds.

Table 8.10 breaks down federal and overall per-pupil funding without Title I and REAP.

Table 8.8, Full Dataset Breakdown by Opportunity Level in Full Dataset (Reardon, et al, 2019)

Category I Districts (1):	Category II Districts (1):	Category III Districts (6):	Category IV Districts (6):	Category V Districts (10)
Whitley	Floyd	Carter	Elliott	Bell
		Letcher	Harlan	Clay
		Knott	Lee	Estill
		Morgan	Perry	Jackson
		Pike	Powell	Leslie
		Rockcastle	Rowan	Martin
				McCreary
				Menifee

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				Owsley
				Wolfe

Table 8.9, Full Dataset Federal Funding Overview by Opportunity Level in Full Dataset (NCES, 2019)

Area	Overall Funds Per Pupil	Federal Funds Per Pupil	Title I Per Pupil	REAP Funds Per Pupil
Category III Districts	\$11,276	\$1,623	\$414.14	\$83.32
Category IV Districts	\$11,325	\$1,803	\$522.13	\$87.05
Category V Districts	\$11,533	\$2,009	\$665.15	\$101.37

Table 8.10, Further Breakdown of Title I and REAP by Opportunity Category in Full Dataset (NCES, 2019)

Category	Total Funding from Title I and REAP	Federal Funding per pupil without Title I and REAP	Overall Funding per pupil without Title I and REAP
Category III Districts	\$497.46	\$1,125.59	\$10,778.24
Category IV Districts	\$609.18	\$1,193.42	\$10,715.70
Category V Districts	\$766.52	\$1,242.84	\$10,766.58

Tables 8.8, 8.9, and 8.10 affirm the data and conclusions regarding the remote rural set. First, when expanding the sample size evaluated, the amount of funds per pupil by opportunity category moves on the upward slope I had expected to find in Table 8.5. In the next chapter, I will look to funding from state sources to evaluate why this discrepancy occurs. Additionally, in

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considering the full dataset, the same patterns of higher federal funding, dependence on two key formula grant programs, and a narrower differential in federal and overall per-pupil funding when those grant programs are excluded from consideration.

Assessment of the Federal Role:

As a whole, the federal role is more difficult to assess than one may think. While the federal government wields an enormous amount of power, it is the form of government least proximate to the remote rural schools studied in this project. In particular, the federal government is a branch that might not be attuned to hear voices from Eastern Kentucky. If the chorus of American democracy, as E.E. Schattschneider theorized, “sings with an upper-class accent,” should the federal government be graded on a curve? (Schlozman, et al, 2014). The answer to that question is a yes and a no. It is fair to account for the fact that Eastern Kentucky is a sliver of America and a politically quiet one; however, federal commitments to the ARC, the ESEA, and the oaths of the region’s federal legislators requires the federal government take the region seriously and treat it fairly.

Still, the role of the federal government in Eastern Kentucky’s schools is a mixed bag. Federal support to Eastern Kentucky’s schools is critical. As available data demonstrated, the remote rural set and Category V schools would be in dire financial straits without the formula grants endowed to them by Title I and the Rural Educational Achievement Program (REAP). However, while the federal government makes the funding and opportunity field *more* level, it does not really push low performing districts over the top or provide an explanation of why school districts in Letcher, Lee, and Elliott Counties have enjoyed gains between fourth and eighth grade testing. Additionally, the region’s representation on “key committees” does not

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seem to have done the area much good. Hal Rogers’ pork barrel projects have provided some assistance to the region and Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul have helped put Kentucky in the national news; however, none of these legislators’ efforts has resulted in sustained progress and funding opportunities for the remote rural schools this project studies.

The federal government’s support has kept Category V school districts from falling even farther behind than they already are. However, when Title I and REAP funding is removed, what the federal government is doing in Eastern Kentucky is relatively standard. Finally, federal funding and programs provide no hint as to why a select amount of school districts are showing improvement between fourth and eighth grade. As a result, the federal government’s response can be best classified as mediocre.

Chapter 8: “Don’t Spit in the Soup, We All Gotta Eat”: Kentucky State’s Education Politics

Overview of Political Representation by the State:

In the 1932 Supreme Court case of *New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann*, Kentucky’s own Associate Justice Louis Brandeis wrote, “it is one of the happy accidents of the federal system that a single courageous state may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory, and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country” (New State Ice, 1932). America’s founders installed a well-oiled system of federalism, where key responsibilities were delegated from the federal government to the states. In a wide range of areas, from managing elections, overseeing state highways, and administering welfare programs, state governments reign sovereign. Areas of education policy are also the responsibility of the state. As stressed in Chapters Two and Three, each state has the power to write their own standardized tests and determine what “proficiency” means in their home state.

Kentucky’s state government holds enormous power in shaping the success of its students, even more so than other states. Table 9.1 displays in form of funding information, the power of Kentucky’s state government relative to state governments across the country.

Table 9.1, State Funding of Schools (NCES, 2019)

Area	State Funding Per Pupil	State Funding as Percentage of Overall Funding
Kentucky	\$5,536	54.70%
Full Dataset	\$7,440	65.51%
Rest of the Country	\$5,477	44.79%

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While Kentucky’s state government funds their schools slightly more per-pupil than the average state, state funding comprises a significantly higher proportion of the school district budgets. As this chapter will later reveal, the reliance on state funding is even higher in the remote rural set of school districts.

Our assessment of the Kentucky state government’s responsiveness will follow a structure largely identical to the structure to our exploration of the federal government’s responsiveness in Chapter Eight. The chapter will begin by studying the same three questions of political representation asked in Chapter Eight: who represents the region, who speaks to these representatives, and how well positioned are those who speak to react to what they hear. From there, I will explore funding data for the counties studied. Finally, I will explore correlations between political representation, funding levels, and school performance before offering a final assessment of how responsive the Kentucky state government has been to the needs of Eastern Kentucky’s underresourced schools.

Representation-I: Who Represents Eastern Kentucky on the State Level?

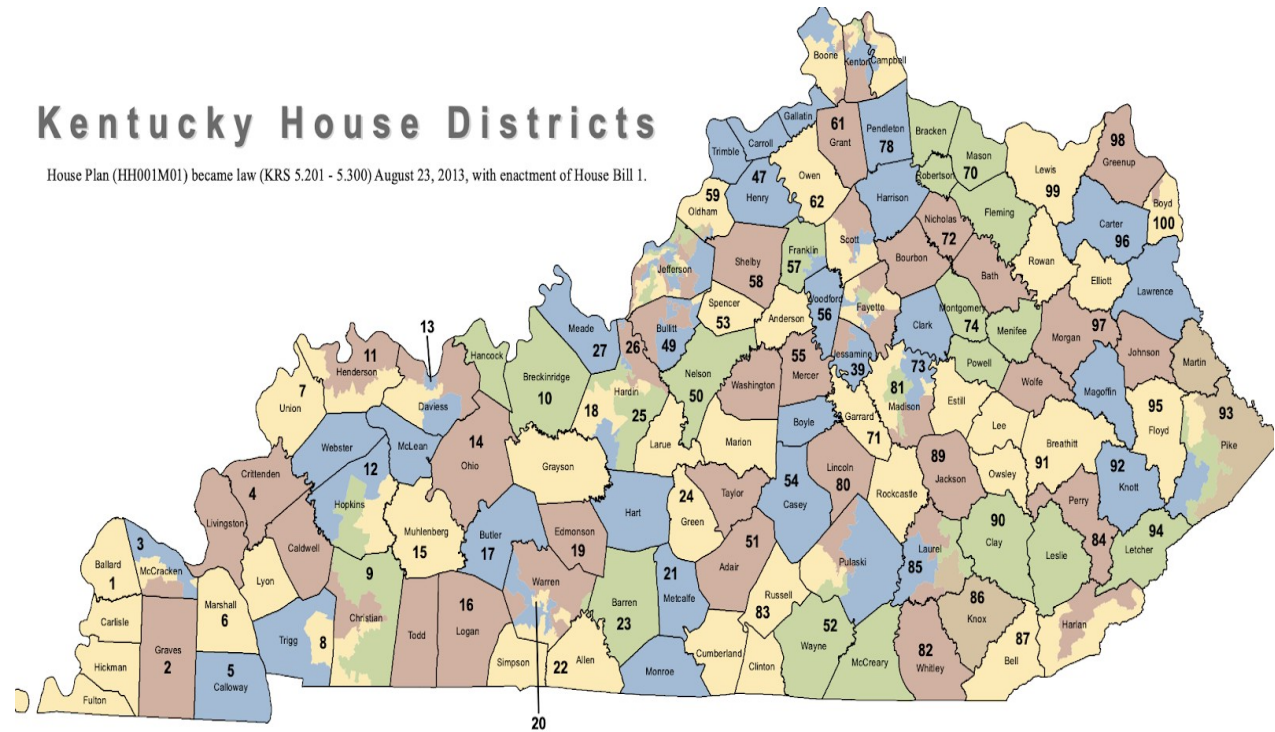
In terms of representative proximity, the state government is a step closer to the remote rural districts considered than the federal government. However, the state government lacks the regulatory power and financial resources that the federal government possesses. Still, as Table 9.1 attests to, the role of the state government in Eastern Kentucky is critical. Eastern Kentuckians can look to three key sources of power at the state level: their state representatives, their state senators, and the governor. This section will further explore the nature of the state legislature.

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Kentucky’s House of Representatives is composed of one-hundred legislative districts.

Figure 9.1 provides the legislature’s map on the county level after the state’s 2013 redistricting.

Figure 9.1, Kentucky House of Representatives Map (Legislative Research Commission, 2013)



House Plan (HH001M01) became law (KRS 5.201 - 5.300) August 23, 2013, with enactment of House Bill 1.

Produced by the Legislative Research Commission Geographic Information Systems Office, Room 26 Capitol Annex, Frankfort, KY, 40601, 502-564-8100, gis@lrc.ky.gov

As the map indicates, many counties in Eastern Kentucky are merged with other counties in the making of state legislative districts. For example, Pike County, which is large enough to form one legislative district, is split into legislative districts 92, 93, 94, and 95. The founders envisioned Houses of Representatives, on both the state and federal level, to be the people’s house, where elected representatives would be close to and represent their home community. However, as Table 9.2 points out, no district in the remote rural set has a house district all to themselves. Counties in the dataset are italicized, while counties in the remote rural part of the

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dataset are bolded and italicized. The American Community Survey’s five-year overview generously provides the poverty rate in each state legislative district, which I also provide in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2, Division of Dataset Across State House Districts (Census Bureau, 2018)

District	Counties Covered	Child Poverty Rate
District 52 (1 of 2 dataset, 1 remote)	McCreary , Wayne	34.8%
District 71 (1 of 3 dataset)	Garrard, Madison, <i>Rockcastle</i>	20.3%
District 74 (2 of 3 dataset, 1 remote)	Menifee , Montgomery, <i>Powell</i>	28.8%
District 82 (1 of 2 dataset)	Laurel, <i>Whitley</i>	34.3%
District 84 (2 of 2 dataset)	<i>Harlan</i> , Perry	37.9%
District 87 (2 of 2 dataset)	<i>Bell</i> , <i>Harlan</i>	48.9%
District 89 (1 of 3 dataset, 1 remote)	Jackson , Laurel, Madison	27.8%
District 90 (2 of 3 dataset)	<i>Clay</i> , Laurel, <i>Leslie</i>	44.1%
District 91 (3 of 4 dataset, 2 remote)	Breathitt, <i>Estill</i> , Owsley , Lee ,	42.2%
District 92 (3 of 3 dataset, 2 remote)	Knott , Magoffin , <i>Pike</i>	41.4%
District 93 (2 of 2 dataset, 1 remote)	Martin , <i>Pike</i>	31.9%
District 94 (2 of 2 dataset, 1 remote)	Letcher , <i>Pike</i>	42.7%
District 95 (2 of 2 dataset)	<i>Floyd</i> , <i>Pike</i>	44.5%
District 96 (1 of 2 dataset)	<i>Carter</i> , Lawrence	34.1%
District 97 (2 of 3 dataset, 2 remote)	Johnson, Morgan , Wolfe	29.5%
District 99 (2 of 3 dataset, 1 remote)	Elliott , Lewis, <i>Rowan</i>	34.5%

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Two major conclusions can be brought out of Table 9.2. First, on a proportional basis, the counties in the dataset should combine for about 12 state house districts, with three to four of them from remote, rural counties. However, the geographical alignment of Eastern Kentucky divides the dataset into seventeen different state house districts. The key result of this division is that these counties lack *their* own representatives. Not a single county in the full dataset has a representative at the state level who can advance the interests of their own, and only their, county.

Additionally, the poverty rate of these state house districts is not representative of the poverty rates of the full dataset and the remote rural districts. Table 9.3 shows this disparity at work.

Table 9.3, Disparity in Child Poverty Rates between Dataset and House Districts (Census Bureau, 2019)

Area	Rate
Average Child Poverty Rate in House Districts containing a Dataset County	36.11%
Average Child Poverty Rate in Dataset Counties	39.23%

These divisions are even more pronounced at the State Senate level. Figure 9.2 provides the legislative map of the state senate, Table 9.4 lists the distribution of state senate districts, and Table 8.5 breaks down the economic differences between the districts and the dataset.

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Figure 9.3, Kentucky Senate Map (Legislative Research Commission, 2013)

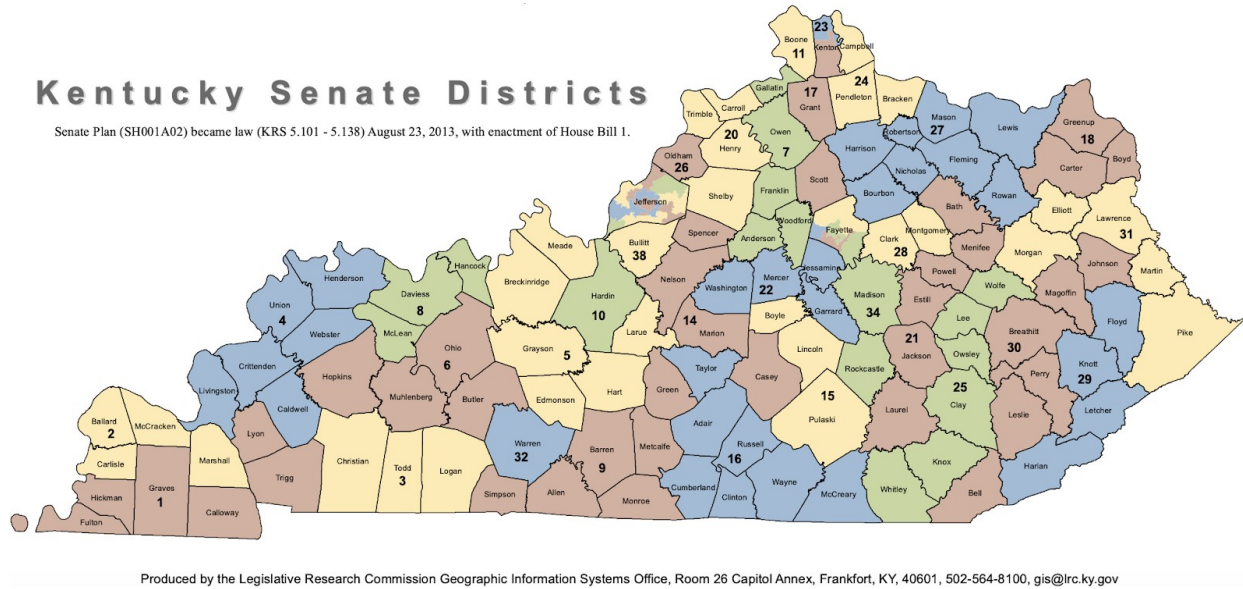


Table 9.4, Division of Dataset Across State Senate Districts (Census Bureau, 2018)

District	Counties Covered	Poverty Rate (weighted by population)
District 16 (1 of 7 dataset, 1 remote)	Adair, Clinton, Cumberland, McCreary , Russell, Taylor, Wayne	33.3%
District 18 (1 of 3 remote)	Boyd, <i>Carter</i> , Greenup	28.1%
District 21 (4 of 6 dataset, 2 remote)	Bath, <i>Estill</i> , Jackson , Laurel, Menifee , <i>Powell</i>	35.4%
District 25 (5 of 6, 3 remote)	<i>Clay</i> , Knox, Lee , Owsley , Wolfe , <i>Whitley</i>	41.2%
District 27 (1 of 8)	Bourbon, Fleming, Harrison, Lewis, Mason, Nicholas, Robertson, and <i>Rowan</i>	29.4%
District 29 (4 of 4, 2 remote)	<i>Floyd</i> , <i>Harlan</i> , Knott , Letcher	46.7%
District 30 (4 of 6, 1 remote)	<i>Bell</i> , Breathitt, Johnson,	37.5%

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	<i>Leslie, Magoffin, Perry</i>	
District 31 (5 of 6, 4 remote)	<i>Elliott, Lawrence, Martin, Morgan, Magoffin, Pike</i>	35.3%
District 34 (1 of 3)	Fayette, Madison, <i>Rockcastle</i>	18.2%

Table 9.5, Disparity in Child Poverty Rates between Dataset and Senate Districts (Census Bureau, 2019)

Area	Rate
Average Child Poverty Rate in Senate Districts containing a Dataset County	33.9%
Average Child Poverty Rate in Dataset Counties	39.23%

As evidenced, county influence is even more spread out on the State Senate level, as is the disparity between average child poverty rates listed in Table 9.5.

In addition to geographical matters, the question of “who represents” Eastern Kentucky in Frankfort must also address party politics. While Eastern Kentucky is incredibly Republican at the federal level, in-state politics are more complicated to assess. Table 9.6 breaks down the party composition of Eastern Kentucky’s state representatives at the beginning of the 2017 legislative session. I used the 2016 Kentucky state legislature’s composition for this; while seats have changed hands both ways since, this was the legislative composition that crafted the education budget analyzed in this chapter.

Table 9.6, Party Composition of the Kentucky Legislature, 2017 (New York Times, 2016)

Legislative Body	Democratic Seats	Republican Seats
State House	5	11
State Senate	3	6

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Those who called Eastern Kentucky “Trump Country” in 2016 clearly did not bother to notice that the Democratic party was more popular at the state and local level. As will be explored in the “who speaks” subsection, a sizable amount of Eastern Kentucky counties supported Andy Beshear’s gubernatorial campaign. In Chapter Four, I argued that the politics of Eastern Kentucky are far more complicated than media narratives describe.

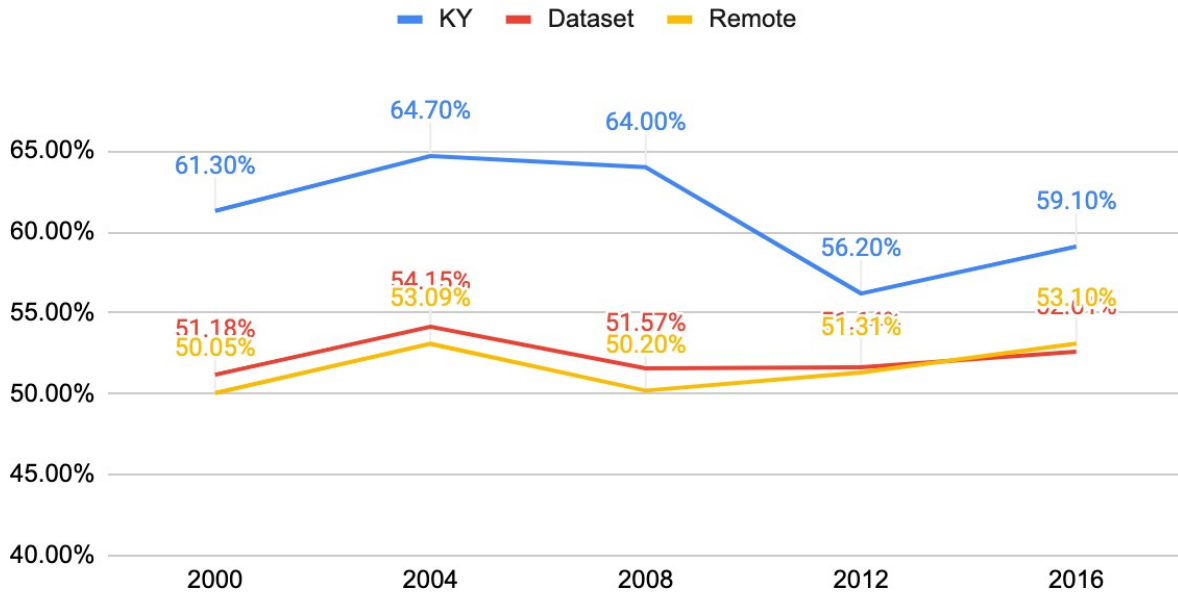
Representation-II: “Who Speaks” to these Representatives?

As stressed in Chapter Seven, the ballot box remains the best way to evaluate how many citizens use their political voices. In this section, I will use voter returns from even and odd year election cycles to provide an assessment of how loudly the region speaks politically in presidential, state, and local election cycles.

Eastern Kentucky’s state representatives are elected to two year terms, every even numbered year. Members of the Kentucky Senate are elected to four-year terms. Odd-numbered districts (“District 31”) are elected on the Presidential-year cycle. Even-numbered district senators are elected during midterm-year election cycles. First, I recopy Figure 8.6 from Chapter Seven. This Figure details voting patterns in Presidential election years, in which state representatives and senators are sometimes chosen.

Copy of Figure 8.6, Turnout of Registered Voters, 2000-2016 (Turnout, n.d.)

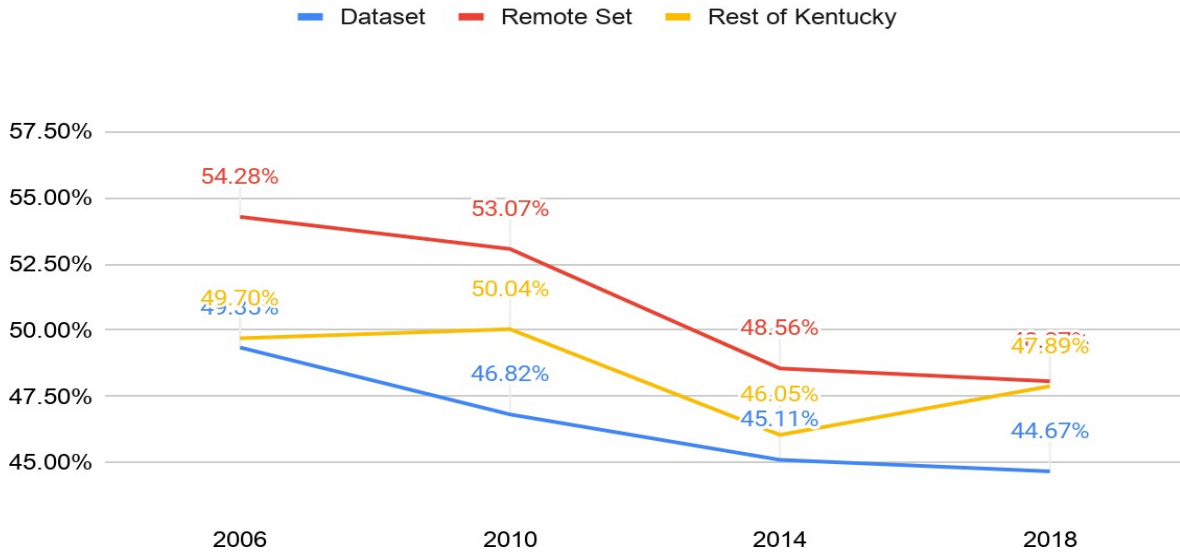
Turnout of Registered Voters, Presidential Election Years 2000-2016



As discussed in Chapter Eight, voter turnout is substantially lower in the remote rural set and full dataset than the rest of the state, as well as the country. Although there was a slight increase in voter participation between the 2012 and 2016 election cycles, the “Trump bump” in turnout is not statistically significant. As stressed in Chapter Seven, the shift in Eastern Kentucky was between people who voted already, not new voters. Figure 9.3 provides further information on how many Eastern Kentuckians flocked to the ballot box in midterm election cycles.

Figure 9.3, Voter Participation in Midterm Election Years, 2006-2018 (Turnout, n.d.)

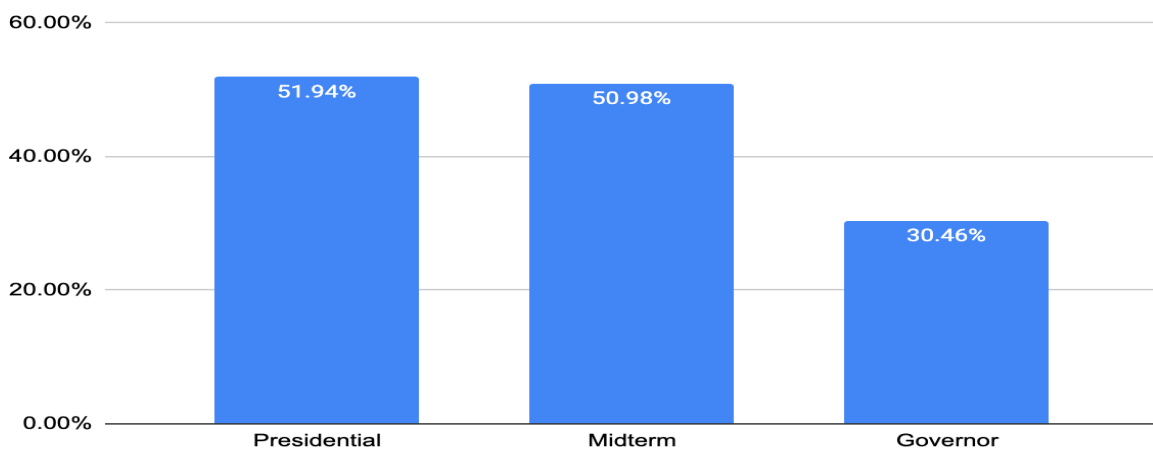
Voter Participation in Midterm Election Years, 2006-2018



As the data indicates, voter participation in midterm elections is reasonably high. In fact, turnout during midterm election cycles in the remote rural counties is almost the same as in Presidential election cycles. Figure 9.4 displays these trends since 2004.

Figure 9.4, Voter Turnout by Election Cycle Type, 2004-2019 (Turnout, n.d.)

Voter Turnout by Election Cycle Type, 2004-2019

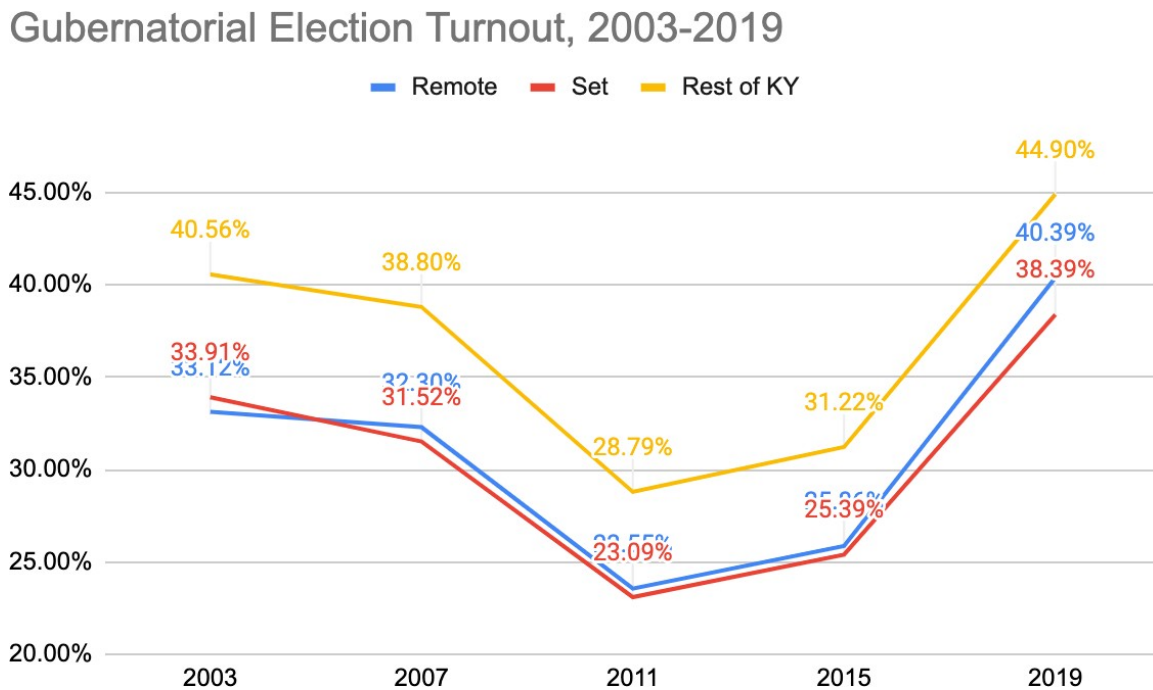


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It is important to note, however, that a key factor driving turnout during midterm election cycles is that this is when counties in Kentucky elect their judge-executives, the top official in each county. Still, the relatively even rates of participation between midterm and presidential years means that State Senators whose terms expire during the non-Presidential even-year cycle need to listen to their constituents more than many of their national peers do.

However, at the gubernatorial level, shifts in political voice are statistically significant. As Figure 9.4 previewed, turnout during gubernatorial cycles is low in Eastern Kentucky. Figure 9.5 displays shifts in voter turnout between the governor elections of 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019.

Figure 9.5, Gubernatorial Election Turnout, 2003-2019 (Turnout, n.d.)



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As Figure 9.4 demonstrates, voter turnout in all parts of Kentucky surged between the 2015 and 2019 Gubernatorial election cycles. As will be explored later in this chapter, the two biggest factors driving turnout in 2019 were healthcare and education (Campbell, 2019). In Presidential election cycles, turnout remained relatively steady. However, the 2019 governor’s race brought an increase in voter turnout that cannot be dismissed as a random happening.

Finally, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, statewide elections present more evidence that Appalachia is not the white, conservative monolith many make the region out to be. Table 9.7 shows county level fluctuations from the 2016 Presidential election to Kentucky’s 2019 Gubernatorial election.

Table 9.7, Changes in Democrat Support Between 2016 and 2019 Elections (New York Times, 2016; Election Results, n.d.)

Area	Clinton Support	Beshear Support	Change
Full Dataset	18.8%	40.8%	+22.0%
Remote Rural Set	17.94%	40.35%	+22.42%

As Table 9.7 shows, Andy Beshear’s campaign may not have won every county in Eastern Kentucky, but he prevented Matt Bevin from running up the score in rural areas, as Donald Trump did across American in 2016. Still, it is critical to point out that Beshear turned Elliott, Knott, and Magoffin Counties blue from both the 2015 Governor’s race and 2016 election. As a whole, Eastern Kentucky’s politics continue to prove more complicated than appearances and popular narratives suggest.

Representation-III: How well positioned are those “Who Listen” to Eastern Kentucky to act on its behalf?

At the state level of government, I defined “key committees” as the following: the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees for Education and the House and Senate Education Committees. In Table 9.8, I list members of each committee from the dataset counties in the State House. Table 9.9 covers the Senate. Dataset counties continue to be italicized and remote rural set counties are bolded and italicized.

Table 9.8, “Key Committee” Representatives in the House (Committees, n.d)

Committee	Member	District #	Counties Served
Appropriations and Education (Chair)	Regina Huff (R)	82	Laurel, <i>Whitley</i>
Appropriations and Education	Bobby McCool (R)	97	Johnson, <i>Morgan, Wolfe</i>
Education	Travis Brenda (R)	71	Garrard, Madison, <i>Rockcastle</i>
Education	Richard White (D)	99	<i>Elliott, Lewis, Rowan</i>

Table 9.9, “Key Committee” Representatives in the Senate (Committees, n.d.)

Committee	Member	District #	Counties Served
Appropriations and Education	Johnny Ray Turner (D)	29	<i>Floyd, Harlan, Knott, Letcher</i>
Education (Chair)	Max Wise (R)	16	Adair, Clinton, Cumberland, <i>McCreary</i> , Russell, Taylor, Wayne
Education	Stephen West (R)	27	Bourbon, Fleming, Harrison, Lewis, Mason, Nicholas, Robertson, and <i>Rowan</i>
Education	Robert Stivers (R)	25	<i>Clay, Knox, Lee, Owsley, Wolfe, Whitley</i>

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Of the house districts, only six of the twenty-six counties in the dataset have a representative on a “key committee.” In the Senate, that number rises to ten out of twenty six; notably, two of the counties who have a representative on a committee come from districts where their interests are a sizable minority. During my evaluation of financial data, I will weigh the impact representation on “key committees” has had on funding for their districts.

Finance, Performance, and Assessment:

Once again, this part of the chapter begins a shift from the factors affecting the politics of Eastern Kentucky’s schools to evaluating the politics in action through school funding allocations, teachers strikes, and electoral consequences. As in Chapter Eight, I will begin this part of the chapter with an analysis of school funding, measuring how well remote rural schools are funded on an overall level. Unlike the previous chapter, I will evaluate several more factors beyond my overall evaluation, including number of counties per representative, political party affiliation, voter turnout rates, poverty rates, and amount of legislators on key committees. From there, I will study correlations between overall funding levels and school performance. Finally, as the funding allocations studied for this chapter were made for Fiscal Year 2017, I will factor in three critical events to evaluate my assessment of the Kentucky government’s responsiveness to the needs of remote rural school districts: Governor Bevin’s education cuts in 2018, the 2018 “sick outs,” and the electoral consequences seen in the 2018 legislative primaries and the 2019 governor’s election.

Finances-I: How well does the State Government fund schools in the Remote Rural Set?

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, the Kentucky state government is the largest source of funding for schools in the state. This is especially true for counties in the remote, rural

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parts of the state. Table 9.10 provides a breakdown of average levels of funding per pupil from the Kentucky state government, notes differences in average allocations of per-pupil funding, and notes the ratio of funds that each district relies on the state government.

Table 9.10, State Funding, FY 2017 (NCES, 2019)

Area	State Funding Per Pupil	Overall Per Pupil Funding	Difference from KY State Average in Overall State Funds	% of Overall Funds coming from State Government
Rest of US	\$5,478	\$12,201	+\$58	44.79%
Rest of KY	\$5,305	\$9,971	-\$231	53.2%
Dataset	\$7,440	\$11,357	+\$1,904	65.51%
Remote Set	\$7,959	\$11,790	+\$2,423	67.51%

When compared to the average school district in Kentucky, schools in the full dataset and the remote rural set are reasonably well endowed by the state government. Table 9.11 displays this dependence on state dollars to help keep schools afloat.

Table 9.11, Per Pupil Funding Minus State Assistance (NCES, 2019)

Area	Average Per Pupil Funds without State Funding
Rest of US	\$6,751
Rest of KY	\$4,666
Dataset	\$3,917
Remote Set	\$3,831

Consequently, without the aid of the state government, Eastern Kentucky’s schools would be in dire financial straits.

School Performance-I: Have funding levels correlated with opportunity categories?

In Chapter Eight I found that schools with higher levels of need (Category V districts) received the highest amounts of federal funding, below-average Category IV school districts were in the middle, and schools with the highest upward trajectories (Category III districts) received the least federal funding. Here, in Chapter Nine, I will again measure state funding by opportunity category. In Table 9.12, I list how state funding breaks down in opportunity categories.

Table 9.12, State Funding Overview Data by Opportunity Category in Remote Rural Set (NCES, 2019)

Area	Child Poverty Rate	State Funds Per Pupil	% of Funds from State Sources
Category III Districts	39.62%	\$7,618	64.35%
Category IV Districts	43.62%	\$8,075	70.93%
Category V Districts	45.55%	\$8,185	69.19%

Table 9.12 displays the same trends found in Chapter Seven. Both in terms of federal and state funding, school districts with lower levels of educational opportunity are receiving higher amounts of funding. However, as Table 9.13 shows, this trend does not hold true when the rest of the dataset is brought into consideration.

Table 9.13, State Funding Overview Data by Opportunity Category in Full Dataset (NCES, 2019)

Area	Child Poverty Rate	State Funds Per Pupil	% of Funds from State Sources
Category III Districts	32.65%	\$7,533	66.81%

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Category IV Districts	37.01%	\$7,383	65.19%
Category V Districts	46.50%	\$7,943	68.87%

These discrepancies lead me to believe more factors come into play in the allocation of educational opportunities than just educational opportunity and economic need. At the beginning of the section, I proposed a score of ways to study how political influence intersects with funding high need schools. Now, I will provide a cross-sectional analysis of how those factors might come into play.

The first variable I controlled for is the number of counties represented by legislators. This stems from my theory that legislators tasked with representing multiple counties will have a harder time fighting for resources for multiple county school districts, as compared with legislators from larger areas, who have multiple representatives fighting for the same geographic zone. Table 9.14 breaks down how this cohort was formed and Title 9.15 displays these allocations both on an overall level and a cross-sectional analysis within categories of educational opportunity.

Table 9.14, Cross-Section of Opportunity Categories and Counties Per State Rep

	Category III	Category IV	Category V
Two counties per state representative	Carter, Letcher	Harlan, Perry	Bell, Martin, McCreary
Three counties per state representative	Knott, Morgan, Rockcastle	Elliott, Powell, Rowan	Clay, Jackson, Leslie, Menifee, Wolfe
Four counties per state representative	None	Lee	Estill, Owsley

Table 9.15, Cross-Sectional Analysis of Counties Represented per each State

Representative

Area	No Opportunity Control	Category III	Category IV	Category V
Two counties per state representative	\$7,635.10	\$7,744.49	\$7,608.37	\$7,793.61
Three counties per state representative	\$7,725.03	\$7,589.53	\$7,130.74	\$8,201.35
Four counties per state representative	\$7,467.91	N/A	\$7,252.00	\$7,528.99

For both Category III and Category IV schools, the difference in funding levels by amount of counties represented by their State Representative is significant; counties whose legislator only represented two counties enjoyed higher levels of funding. However, this trend does not translate perfectly over Category V schools, which have the highest sample size.

Next, I control for political affiliation. While I expect political affiliation to influence funding levels more at the local level, I take a look in Table 9.16 to see how Democratic and Republican legislators compare in educational appropriations at both the House and Senate level.

Table 9.16, Cross Section of Educational Opportunity Category and Party

Representation (NCES, 2019)

Area	No Opportunity Control	Category III	Category IV	Category V
Democratic House District	\$7,475.20	\$7,447.98	\$7,467.13	\$7,556.73

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Republican Senate District	\$7,681.46	\$7,619.41	\$7,285.90	\$8,059.27
Democratic Senate District	\$7,508.59	\$7,496.07	\$8,105.22	\$7,218.00
Republican Senate District	\$7,699.05	\$7,801.00	\$7,043.22	\$8,018.26

When I excluded categories of educational opportunity from the equation, political party representation showed promise of explaining gaps in political funding. However, when broken down into categories of educational opportunity, no correlations by party affiliation or category provided any clear explanation of how some districts rise, some stagnate, and some get even farther behind educationally.

Finally, I controlled for representation that districts have on “key committees.” In Table 9.17 and 9.18, I omit individual statistics for each legislative chamber’s Appropriations Subcommittees on Education. I do so because every member of the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Education also have seats on the House and Senate Education Committees, making these representatives even more powerful.

Table 9.17, Cross-Section of Seats on “Key Committees” and Opportunity Categories

	No control	Category III	Category IV	Category V
Seat on Education	Clay, Elliott, Lee, McCreary, Owsley, Rockcastle, Rowan	Rockcastle	Elliott, Lee, Rowan	Clay, McCreary, Owsley
Seats on Education and Appropriations	Floyd, Harlan, Knott, Letcher, Morgan, Whitley, Wolfe	Knott, Letcher, Morgan	Harlan	Wolfe
Seats on Neither	Bell, Carter, Estill, Jackson, Martin, Menifee, Morgan, Perry, Powell, Pike	Carter, Pike	Perry, Powell	Bell, Estill, Jackson, Leslie, Martin, Menifee

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**Table 9.18, Cross-Section of Seats on “Key Committees” and Opportunity Categories
(NCES, 2019)**

	No control	Category III	Category IV	Category V
Average Funds Per Pupil	\$7,608	\$7,533	\$7,383	\$7,943
Seat on Education	\$7,573.23	\$7,085.99	\$7,085.99	\$7,849.68
Seats on Education and Appropriations	\$7,679.46	\$7,618.27	\$7,926.00	\$9,025.00
Seats on Neither	\$7,567.63	\$7,426.37	\$7,290.67	\$7,880.83

The analysis of the cross-section provided in Table 9.18 proves that models of old-fashioned American politics and seemingly arcane legislative rules still matter. In Kentucky, the power of the purse sits with the legislative appropriations committees; school funding data reflects that power. Especially when excluding Whitley County (Category I district) and Floyd County (Category II district), the gaps in funding between districts whose members have seats on the Educational Appropriations Subcommittee and those who do not are even more significant. At least at the state level, it not only matters how many representatives you have and who your representative is but what committees that representative sits on in determining how well endowed your school district is.

On the other hand, it appears that having your legislator on the education committee does not do as much good. In some ways, this should be unexpected, as the role of the education committee is more concerned with policy. Nevertheless, the crosstabs show that that in some cases, districts with seats only on education sometimes do worse than districts where legislators have no seats on education or appropriations. However, districts with seats on education and

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appropriations do almost disproportionately well. Unfortunately, no cases where a district only has seats on the appropriation subcommittee exist in the full dataset to explore how those variables intersect. Still, assignment to “key committees” bears a significant positive in the funding that school districts receive from the state.

Assessment of the State Role:

Before offering a final assessment in evaluating how responsive the Kentucky state government has been to underresourced schools in the remote rural set, four recent events must be discussed: Governor Bevin’s budget cuts, the teacher “sick outs,” the primarying of responsible legislators, and election of Governor Andy Beshear

First, Governor Matt Bevin made the poor choice to make an enemy of Kentucky’s teachers. In January 2018, Bevin proposed a budget that ordered every Kentucky school district to cut its administrative costs by 12 percent, challenging districts to make up the revenue loss by increasing funding from the local level (McLauren and Ross, 2018). However, this plan was met with significant pushback from Eastern Kentucky; coal counties with decreasing revenues would have been crippled by these cuts (McLauren and Ross, 2018). Bevin continued his reform agenda by targeting teacher pensions, in a bill that was originally advertised as an effort to reform wastewater services (WKYT, 2018). While the bill barely passed, with most of Eastern Kentucky’s Republicans voting no, the law was eventually struck down after a lawsuit by then-Attorney General Beshear (Associated Press, 2018). The teacher pension cuts led to thousands of teachers walking out on the job. After the pension backlash, Bevin then vetoed a budget which would have increased school funding (Campbell, 2019).

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For Kentucky teachers, Bevin’s efforts were too much. As Kentucky does not allow public employees to go on strike to protest, teachers attempted a work around: calling out sick en-masse. Three regions of Kentucky constituted the majority of the “sick-out” school districts: Louisville, Lexington and the Bluegrass region, the southern end of the coalfield (Costello and Sayers, 2018). In Chapter Five, I highlighted the radical union activism done by the UMWA in Eastern Kentucky. It should be no surprise that among the sick-out counties included Bell, Floyd, Leslie, Letcher, Martin, Pike, Wolfe, and other counties in the southern end of the coalfield (Costello and Sayers, 2018). The data represented in Chapter Six shows that Eastern Kentucky is struggling economically. High unemployment and the dwindling of the coal industry limits local revenues. While Bevin's educational cuts might not have had such an impact in wealthier Bluegrass counties, it was going to be dramatically felt in the coalfields (McLauren and Ross, 2018). At this time, Governor Bevin and the Kentucky State Legislature truly was not responsive to the needs of Eastern Kentucky.

In 2018, Kentucky voters, especially in Eastern Kentucky, began to respond forcefully to Governor Bevin’s cuts to education. In Rockcastle County, top Republican State Representative Jonathan Shell, was primaried by Math teacher Travis Brenda for writing the pension bill (Haag, 2018). Twelve current and former educators, on both sides of the aisle, won primary elections that day (Barton, 2018). In 2019, Andy Beshear centered his campaign around education, promising every teacher a raise, protecting the pension system, and naming a teacher as his running mate (Campbell, 2019). As Table 9.7 demonstrated, Beshear’s efforts paid off, as he outpaced Hillary Clinton’s totals in the remote rural set by over twenty-two percentage points.

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Schools in Eastern Kentucky are predominantly dependent on state support, which in most cases constitutes over 70 percent of a school district’s funding (NCES). The budget in Fiscal Year 2017 was reasonably responsive to the needs of the remote rural schools. However, school districts whose representatives served on key committees were better equipped to gain more funding than their peer districts in each subcategory. Governor Bevin’s cuts to school districts, which would have truly affected the communities in the remote rural set and full dataset were not responsive to what Eastern Kentucky needed. To see that, we not only have to look at the effects Bevin’s policies had on the remote rural set but also to their response at the ballot box. Communities where over 75 percent of voters went with President Trump flipped over to Governor Beshear. At the moment, district level breakdowns of Fiscal Data from the Beshear Administration are not available. Once school funding allocations from Beshear years become available, Beshear’s policies could be evaluated on the same scope as Bevin’s.

This chapter evaluates how responsive the Kentucky government has been through Governor Bevin’s administration. At the start of Bevin’s administration in 2015, funding levels demonstrated that the state government greatly assisted Eastern Kentucky’s schools. At the time, the average school in the remote rural set received more per pupil overall than the average school in the rest of Kentucky. Governor Bevin inherited a funding apparatus in 2015 that was not broken; however, he moved to make changes which disadvantaged Eastern Kentucky’s school districts and antagonized their teachers. Bevin’s actions created a structure where the state government became unresponsive to Eastern Kentucky’s needs. As a result, thousands of voters in Eastern Kentucky crossed party lines in 2019 to demand a state government more responsive

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to the needs of their struggling schools. Bevin forgot Lyndon Johnson’s cardinal policymaking rule: “don’t spit in the soup, we all gotta eat.”

Chapter 9: “All Politics is Local”: Innovation and Shortfalls at the County Level

Chapter Overview:

Here, the topic shifts to the government closest to Eastern Kentucky’s citizens: local government. As discussed earlier, the representation that Eastern Kentucky possessed in the Congress and state legislature has declined with the region’s population dip. As a result, citizens’ votes count for more at the county level. The benefits and downsides of increased citizen voice at the local level will now be examined in depth.

My analysis of Eastern Kentucky’s local government will follow a structure similar to Chapters Eight and Nine. Once again what political representation looks like will be evaluated, before moving on to assess relationships between school funding and student performance. However, I will move to explore questions of political responsiveness on a more micro level. Because school performance, local revenues, and overall policymaking varies from county to county in Eastern Kentucky, particular attention will be paid to counties that are succeeding as well as counties that are struggling.

Representation-I: Who Represents Eastern Kentucky on the Local Level?

At the local level, almost all counties in Kentucky are led by an officer known as the “county judge-executive.” Per the rules of Kentucky’s constitution, the judge-executive is primarily responsible for matters of fiscal administration (Byerman, 2016). The judge-executive serves as the presiding officer of each county’s fiscal court. They propose the annual budget for the county, which is then approved by the fiscal court. In addition, the judge-executive must also

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incorporate revenue estimates for their county, along with the state and federal government, while proposing their county’s budget. In addition to electing a judge-executive, each county’s voters elect members of the fiscal court. The individuals holding seats on the fiscal court are either termed “magistrates” or “justices of the peace” depending on county tradition (Byerman, 2016). Depending on a county’s size and structure, each county elects between three and eight individuals to serve with the judge-executive on the fiscal court (Byerman, 2016).

An analysis of who holds county offices continues to demonstrate the nuance and complexity of Eastern Kentucky’s politics. Table 10.1 displays the overall breakdown of county judge-executives by political party in the latest round of judge-executive elections in November 2018.

Table 10.1, Judge Executives in Eastern Kentucky by Party (Kentucky Judge-Executive Association, n.d)

	Democrat Judge-Executives	Republican Judge-Executives	Independent Judge-Executives
Remote Rural Set	6	6	0
Full Dataset	11	13	1

As a whole, the level of party representation in judge-executive offices is quite even among the two major political parties. However, when removing judge-executives who ran unopposed, the Democratic party in Eastern Kentucky appears even stronger. Table 10.2 considers the results of counties that were “contested,” where both major parties put a candidate on the ballot in 2018.

Table 10.2, Judge-Executive Results in Contested Counties (Kentucky Association of Counties, 2018)

	Democrat Judge-Executives	Republican Judge-Executives	Independent Judge-Executives
Remote Rural Set	4	4	0
Full Dataset	9	5	1

While some of the counties where candidates ran unopposed are traditionally Republican (Clay or Leslie) or traditionally Democrat (Elliott or Wolfe), the fact that Democratic candidates won more contested races is significant.

As trends have continue to demonstrate, the more local the office in Eastern Kentucky, the stronger the Democratic party seems to perform. Table 10.3 provides a breakdown of which party holds a majority on each county’s fiscal court.

Table 10.3, Party Majorities in Fiscal Courts (Kentucky Association of Counties, 2018)

	Democrat Fiscal Court Majority	Republican Fiscal Court Majority	Independent Fiscal Court Majority
Remote Rural Set	7	5	0
Full Dataset	14	11	0

Here, at the level of the fiscal court, the Democratic party continues to hold majorities at the local levels. Table 10.4 continues this study by offering an analysis of how many total seats the parties hold on fiscal courts.

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Table 10.4, Overall Membership of Fiscal Courts (Kentucky Association of Counties, 2018)

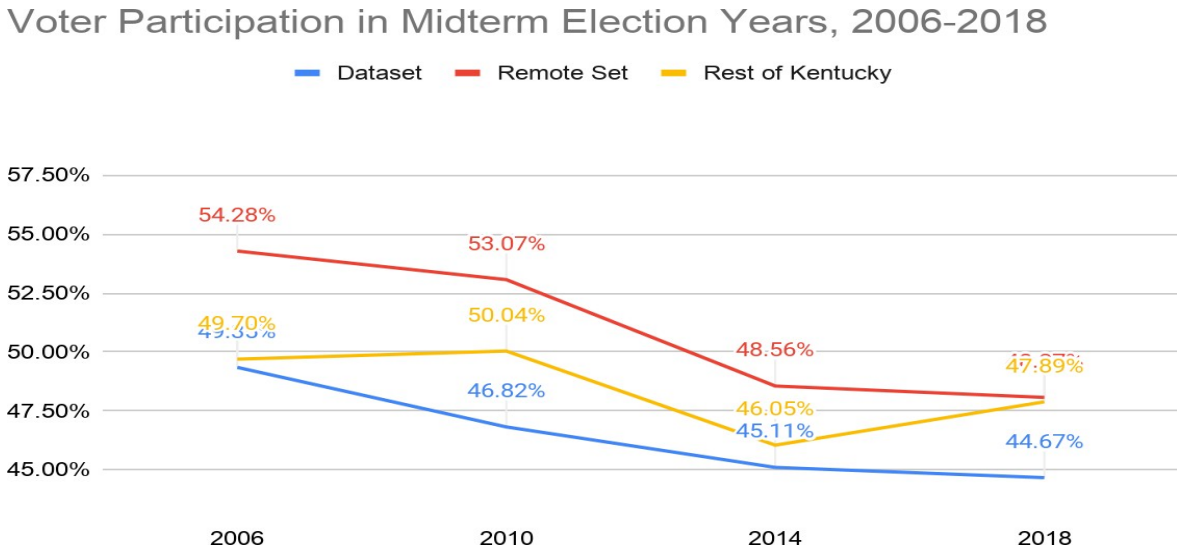
	Democrat Fiscal Court Members	Republican Fiscal Court Members	Independent Fiscal Court Members
Remote Rural Set	57	50	2
Full Dataset	29	21	1

As a whole, the results of the 2018 Kentucky local elections show the strength of the Democratic party in Eastern Kentucky. “Tip” O’Neill once espoused that “all politics is local” (O’Neill, et al, 2014). Within Eastern Kentucky, despite strong conservative trends in federal elections, local politics continues to remain local.

Representation-II: “Who Speaks” to these Representatives?

Now, this study will continue to evaluate the question of “who speaks” politically through an analysis of voter turnout and voter preferences. County judge-executives and members of the fiscal court are all elected to four-year terms (Byerman, 2016). Elections for county officials occur during the same four year cycle as national midterm elections (e.g. 2018, 2014,). Placing county elections during a midterm cycle instead of an “off year” (e.g. 2017 or 2019) cycle likely helps to increase voter turnout for these critical local races. Figure 9.3, which displayed turnout during midterm election cycles is copied below.

Figure 9.3, Voter Participation in Midterm Election Years, 2006-2018 (Turnout, n.d.)



While voter turnout in local election cycles has slightly declined among the remote rural counties in the twelve year cycle evaluated, levels of turnout in local elections are still close to levels of turnout in Presidential election cycles. The election cycles of 2006 and 2010 experienced higher voter turnout than the subsequent Presidential election cycles of 2008 and 2012. Even as turnout in the remote rural set in 2018 decreased to 48.07 percent, that only constituted a 5.03 percent difference from voter turnout in the set during the 2016 Presidential election. As a result, Kentucky’s judge-executives are more accountable to their constituents.

An analysis of election results in contested judge executive races continues to complicate the Trump country narrative attached to Eastern Kentucky. Table 10.5 displays the overall voting results for judge-executive elections in the counties studied in 2018. This count will exclude counties where a candidate ran unopposed.

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Table 10.5, Judge Executive Election Results (Kentucky Association of Counties, 2018)

	Percentage of Votes for Democrat Judge-Executive	Percentage of Votes for Republican Judge Executive	Percentage of Votes for Independent Judge Executive
Remote Rural Set	49.79%	46.62%	3.59%
Full Dataset	52.78%	41.04%	6.19%

In 2018, more votes were cast for Democratic judge-executive candidates than Republican ones. Despite the resounding success President Trump enjoyed in Eastern Kentucky in 2016, the Republican party is struggling to win down-ballot races in the region. Tables 10.6 and 10.7 display the variation of Eastern Kentuckians’ voter preferences in electing top federal, state, and local officeholders.

Table 10.6, Democratic Party Performance (Election Results, n.d.; Kentucky Association of Counties, 2018; New York Times, 2016)

Democratic Party Performance	2016 Presidential Election	2019 Gubernatorial Election	2018 Judge-Executive Elections	Variation from Federal to Local Level
Remote Rural Set	17.94%	40.35%	49.79%	+31.85%
Full Dataset	18.80%	40.80%	52.78%	+33.98%

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Table 10.7 Republican Party Performance (Election Results, n.d.; Kentucky Association of Counties, 2018; New York Times, 2016)

Republican Party Performance	2016 Presidential Election	2019 Gubernatorial Election	2018 Judge-Executive Elections	Variation from Federal to Local Level
Remote Rural Set	79.27%	56.95%	46.62%	-32.65%
Full Dataset	78.38%	56.79%	41.04%	-37.34%

As Tables 10.6 and 10.7 prove, the variation in voting patterns from the federal to the local level is significant. From the federal to local level, Eastern Kentucky experiences swings in party performance of over thirty points.

At the state level, education funding was central to the election of Governor Andy Beshear in 2019. Funding data gives us reason to believe that this is critical at the local level as well. Table 10.8 finds differences between the levels of local funding depending on which party is in control of the judge-executive office and the fiscal court.

Table 10.8, Education Funding by County Party Control Among Remote Rural Counties (NCES, 2019)

Control	Local Funding Per Pupil
Republican Judge-Executive (6 of 12)	\$1,637
Republican Fiscal Court (5 of 12)	\$1,433
Democratic Judge-Executive (6 of 12)	\$2,047
Democratic Fiscal Court (7 of 12)	\$2,157

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Educational issues have been at the forefront of Kentucky politics in recent years. In many ways, they provide a strong explanation for why the Democratic party is succeeding locally in a way they are not nationally.

Representation-III: How well positioned are those “Who Listen” to Eastern Kentucky to act on its behalf?

County officials in Eastern Kentucky enjoy both great opportunities and great challenges in their efforts. On one hand, judge-executives and fiscal court members have a close proximity to their constituents. Table 10.9 shows the ratio of citizens to representatives and shows the closeness local officials have to their constituents.

Table 10.9, Remote Rural Population Ratio by Office Level Considered (Census Bureau, 2018)

Public Official Considered	Remote Rural Population: Public Official’s Constituency	Constituents Represented in Office
President of the United States	1:25,000	327,167,000
Governor or United States Senator	3:100	4,468,402
United States Congressman	9:50	695,101
State Senator	1:5	111,710
State Representative	17:50	44,684
County Judge-Executive	1:1	11,455
County Fiscal Court Member	4:1	2,864

The economic struggles of these counties presents a difficulty for local officials who are far more likely to know their constituents. Local officials face the difficulty of having to generate

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revenues from their low-income constituencies. Counties in Eastern Kentucky charge both a county property tax for roads, courts, and county operations, as well as a county school tax for public education. Local governments in Eastern Kentucky charge higher rates of property taxes than their in-state peers. However, even with county higher property tax rates, these counties receive lower revenues. Table 10.10 demonstrates that despite higher county property rates, counties in Eastern Kentucky are revenue deprived.

Table 10.10, Estimated County Property Tax Revenues, Fiscal Year 2017 (Census Bureau, 2018; Kentucky Department of Revenue, 2018)

Area	Median Household Income	County Property Tax Rate	Estimated Property Tax Rate Collected Per Household
Rest of Kentucky	\$52,239.56	3.91%	\$2,044.04
Remote set	\$30,625.11	5.05%	\$1,545.52

In addition, this data demonstrates that county judge-executives and fiscal boards in Eastern Kentucky face unique financial challenges in funding county operations. Overall, the positioning of county officials in Eastern Kentucky is a mixed blessing: on one hand, county officials possess a firsthand understanding of their constituents’ lives; however, the fiscal challenges that these representatives face limits the potential of county officials to make positive change on behalf of the citizens they represent.

Finance, Performance, and Assessment:

Here, this work will now transition from evaluating the nature of school politics and factors it towards analyzing the politics at work. First, I will examine how well counties fund

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their school districts and discuss the overall state of school taxes. Next, the section will move to discussing school performance and evaluate district funding by opportunity category.

Additionally, local innovations, both in regards to school policies and increasing available revenues. Finally, an assessment of the local government’s role in Eastern Kentucky will be offered.

Finance: How well do Local Governments fund schools in the Remote Rural Set on an overall level?

The remote rural counties face unique challenges in producing revenues. Table 10.11 provides a breakdown of average levels of funding per pupil from the local governments, shows differences in average allocations of per-pupil funding, and notes the ratio of funds that each district receives on the local government.

Table 10.11, Local Funding, Fiscal Year 2019 (NCES, 2019)

Area	Local Funding Per Pupil	Overall Per Pupil Funding	Difference from Local Average in Overall Local Funds	% of Overall Funds coming from Local Government
Rest of US	\$5,820	\$12,201	+\$2,399.32	47.60%
Rest of KY	\$3,602	\$9,971	+\$181.21	36.13%
Full Dataset	\$1,927.72	\$11,357	-\$1,493.28	16.97%
Remote Set	\$1,794.34	\$11,790	-\$1,626.66	15.22%

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Table 10.11 shows the weakness of county governments in Eastern Kentucky. As Table 7.5 (copied again below) demonstrates, the funding shortfalls that Eastern Kentucky’s schools experience are truly caused by a lack of local funding.

Table 7.5, Funding Levels of Dataset Schools, Fiscal Year 2017 (NCES, 2018)

Variable	Per Pupil Funds	Federal	State	Local
Rest of United States	\$12,229	\$986	\$5,477	\$5,820
Rest of Kentucky	\$9,971	\$1,084	\$5,305	\$3,602
Full Dataset	\$11,357	\$1,822.14	\$7,440	\$1,927.72
Remote Set	\$11,790	\$2,036.13	\$7,959	\$1,794.34

The state of Kentucky and the federal government heavily subsidize the remote rural schools studied; however, these subsidies are not enough to make up for the massive shortfalls in funding at the local level. Students in learning environments as disadvantaged as those in the remote rural set need to receive the same funding per pupil as the average American student. The funding gaps presented in this work clearly demonstrate one way in which Eastern Kentucky’s students are being left behind by all branches of government.

However, just because revenues are low does not necessarily mean that the county governments are not being responsive to their school districts. Table 10.10 found that counties in the dataset charged higher rates of property taxes but earned less revenue per household. If a similar pattern emerged with school taxes, local governments would earn a passing grade.

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Nonetheless, for some county governments in Eastern Kentucky, this is not the case. Table 10.12 shows school tax revenue estimates for Fiscal Year 2017.

Table 10.12, Estimated School Tax Revenues, Fiscal Year 2017

Area	Median Household Income	School Tax Rate	Estimated School Tax Rate Collected Per Household Per Pupil	Overall Actual Local Funding Per Pupil
Rest of Kentucky	\$52,240	6.51%	\$3,402	\$3,602
Remote set	\$30,011	5.68%	\$1,705	\$1,794

Here, the statistics speak for themselves. As Table 10.10 alluded to, county governments are charging higher rates of property tax than the rest of the state in order to make fiscal ends meet. However, the vast majority of county governments in the remote rural counties are not doing the same thing. If school tax rates equaled the state average, it would make a difference in helping to level the playing field in Eastern Kentucky. Table 10.13 proves raising the school tax to the state average or applying the same tax rate differential used with property taxes would make a significant difference.

Table 10.13, Estimate School Tax Revenues with Tax Increases

Remote Rural Funding with Tax Adjustments	Tax Rate as is	State Average Tax Rate (6.51%)	Same Difference Between County Property Tax Average and State Average (7.65%)
Estimated Local School Tax Per Pupil	\$1,740	\$1,954	\$2,296
Local Overall Funding Per Pupil	\$1,794	\$2,008	\$2,350

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Overall Funding Per Pupil	\$11,790	\$11,994	\$12,336
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The average student in the United States receives \$12,201 per pupil. If the remote rural counties were to institute a 0.93 percent increase in the school tax, schools in the remote rural counties would be just over \$200 away from the national per pupil average. Furthermore, as the last column shows, if Eastern Kentucky counties were to tax schools similarly to how they tax property, schools in the remote rural counties would be funded at rates higher than the national average.

In order for students in the remote rural school districts to be funded at the national average, county governments need to do one of two things: grow the tax base or raise taxes. The economic struggles of Eastern Kentucky present a challenge to both options. The decline of the coal industry has left these counties at an economic loss. Similarly, increasing taxes on an economically struggling population may also not be feasible. Nonetheless, action needs to be taken at the local level to prevent Eastern Kentucky’s schoolchildren from falling prey to the region’s vicious cycle of poverty.

School Performance: How have funding levels correlated with performance improvement?

This section will scrutinize levels of investment in schools per opportunity categories. Previously, levels of educational investment by the federal and state government were correlated with how I measured need in the Model of Educational Opportunity. Table 10.14 evaluates if those trends hold on the local level.

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Table 10.14, Local Funding Overview Data by Opportunity Category in Remote Rural Set

Area	Child Poverty Rate	Local Funds Per Pupil	% of Funds from Local Sources
Category III Districts	39.62%	\$2,391	20.20%
Category IV Districts	43.62%	\$1,352	11.87%
Category V Districts	45.55%	\$1,444	12.21%

As Table 10.14 demonstrates, the most successful remote rural schools in the dataset share one thing in common: investment at the local level. Table 10.15 displays the median household income and property tax rates across the categories of educational opportunity within the remote rural set.

Table 10.15, Property Tax Rates for Districts by Educational Opportunity Category in Remote Rural Set (Kentucky Department of Revenue, 2018; NCES, 2019)

	Median Household Income	School Tax Rate	Local Per Pupil Funding
Category III Schools	\$30,765	6.15%	\$2,391
Category IV Schools	\$29,493	4.44%	\$1,352
Category V Schools	\$29,392	5.44%	\$1,444

Table 9.15 shows a critical distinction between Category III, IV, and V school districts in the set. The difference in median household income between school districts in these three categories is not significant; however, the differences in rates of school taxes are.

Tables 10.16 and 10.17 provide a summary of the relationship between categories of educational opportunity and funding levels provided by each level of government.

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Table 10.16, Total Funding Levels Per Pupil by Category in Remote Set, Fiscal Year 2017

(NCES, 2019)

Variable	Federal Per Pupil	State Per Pupil	Local Per Pupil	Total Per Pupil
Rest of United States	\$986	\$5,477	\$5,820	\$12,229
Rest of Kentucky	\$1,084	\$5,305	\$3,602	\$9,971
Remote Rural Category III School Districts	\$1,830	\$7,618	\$2,391	\$11,840
Remote Rural Category IV School Districts	\$1,958	\$8,075	\$1,352	\$11,385
Remote Rural Category V School Districts	\$2,201	\$8,185	\$1,444	\$11,831

Table 10.17, Ratio of Funds from Branch of Government to Remote Set, Fiscal Year 2017

(NCES, 2019)

Variable	Federal	State	Local
Rest of United States	8.07%	44.79%	47.60%
Rest of Kentucky	10.87%	53.20%	36.13%
Remote Rural Category III School Districts	15.46%	64.35%	20.20%
Remote Rural Category IV School Districts	17.20%	70.93%	11.87%

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Remote Rural Category V School Districts	18.61%	69.19%	12.21%
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As shown in Table 10.16, the American educational system does not convert overall need for funding into higher amounts of overall funding. The federal government is distributing funding most equitably, as Category V districts find themselves most helped. At the state level, Category V districts again are the greatest recipients of state funds. However, on an overall level, Category III districts, where educational opportunities are higher, are the best funded school districts because of local investment.

The residents of Category III school districts are not well endowed economically. The three counties comprising these districts - Knott, Letcher, and Morgan - are below national medians in child poverty and household income. Table 10.18 attests to the poverty inherent in the Category III school districts studied.

Table 10.18, Category III School District Economic Comparison (Census Bureau, 2018)

	Child Poverty Rate	Median Household Income
Category III School Districts	39.62%	\$30,765
Kentucky	23%	\$50,027
United States	18%	\$61,937

What differentiates Category III school districts from Category IV or Category V are major differences in local investment. Category IV and V school districts do have marginally higher rates of poverty than Category III school districts; however, due to a lack of local investment, students in Category IV or V districts are not as well funded. As predicted, districts with better

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mitigating structures, which are more predominant in Category III, make investments to help their students overcome inequalities at the starting line.

Assessment of the Local Role:

Given the varied funding schemes from county to county, offering an overall analysis of the role played by county governments presents challenges. Still, several macro-level lessons can be learned. While the federal and state government both have the financial resources to increase funding to needy school districts, cash-strapped county governments do not. However, a low tax base does not excuse county governments in Eastern Kentucky of responsibility for their struggling schools. While county governments levy a property tax over a point above the state average, their school taxes are almost a percentage point below the state average. Although Eastern Kentucky has many needs, investing in education should be a county’s top priority.

Specifically, where county governments have invested in their schools, those schools have higher levels of educational opportunities. While school tax rates in these counties are higher, so are test scores and rates of educational improvement. The differences in median income and child poverty between Category III remote schools and their Category IV and Category V counterparts is not substantial; however, differences in county revenues flowing into these school districts are substantial. The overall record of county governments in Eastern Kentucky varies. While some county governments are increasing their investment in education, others are not.

Chapter 11: “For Themselves and For Their Children”:

Conclusion

Appalachia is a place where “working people, and those who wish there was work...battle for dignity and security, for themselves and for their children” (Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 1975). That battle for dignity and security, for better schools and a better quality of life, is a fight that has gone on for decades and continues today. While the students who attend Eastern Kentucky’s remote rural schools are a small portion of our population, their plight matters. Every underresourced school district, whether it be in a large city or rural community, demands our attention. In this chapter, I will offer two sets of conclusions. First, a general conclusion on this project’s evaluation of government responsiveness and school performance will be offered. Second, I will present three corollary conclusions which were found in the process of reaching the project’s major conclusion. Finally, I will attempt to end this project on a more uplifting note.

Central Finding: Local Government is the Difference Maker

In the introduction of this project, I argued that the relationship between political representation and school financing could explain how some school districts in Eastern Kentucky perform better than others. The Model of Educational Opportunity heavily accounted for these factors in categorizing the school districts that were run through the model. However, I cautioned that such a relationship had to be evaluated separately at the federal, state, and local levels of government. Table 10.17 showed total levels of funding that Category III, IV, and V schools received from each branch of government.

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Table 10.17, Total Funding Levels Per Pupil by Category in Remote Set, Fiscal Year 2017

Variable	Federal Per Pupil	State Per Pupil	Local Per Pupil	Total Per Pupil
Rest of United States	\$986	\$5,477	\$5,820	\$12,229
Rest of Kentucky	\$1,084	\$5,305	\$3,602	\$9,971
Remote Rural Category III School Districts	\$1,830	\$7,618	\$2,391	\$11,840
Remote Rural Category IV School Districts	\$1,958	\$8,075	\$1,352	\$11,385
Remote Rural Category V School Districts	\$2,201	\$8,185	\$1,444	\$11,831

Eastern Kentucky’s most vulnerable school districts are incredibly reliant on support from the federal and state government. However, the response of the federal and state government still ought to be classified as mediocre. Although the major funding shortfall for these districts exists at the local level, the fact remains that state and federal governments are not funding Eastern Kentucky’s neediest schools to the point where per pupil funding would be equal to the national average of school funding.

Additionally, in this analysis it was found that local investment proved to be the most significant indicator for why some school districts improved faster and fell ended up in Category III, while others continued to regress and could be classified as Category V. The counties that

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placed a fiscal premium on education produced higher rates of improvement and better educational outcomes.

In Chapter Six, it was proved how students in the remote rural schools started behind and often fell further behind their peers. Table 10.1 shows the average score (composite of reading and math) received in the districts considered.

Table 11.1, Average Composite Scores in Dataset by Category (Reardon, et al. 2019)

Area Studied	8th Grade Average Score, 2013-2015 Cohort	4th Grade Average Score, 2009-2011 Cohort	Improvement Rate
National	273.75	229.75	44.0
Full Remote Set Average	265.9	226.8	39.1
Remote Category III	270.4	226.1	44.3
Remote Category IV	261.9	223.4	38.5
Remote Category IV	262.9	226.6	36.3

As was proven in Chapters Five and Six, students are behind their peers in fourth grade and fall even further behind by eighth grade. However, different districts experienced different levels of change and improvement. The Category III cohort kept even with national levels of progress while the students in the Category IV and V cohorts fell further behind.

In Chapters Seven through Nine, I found that neither socioeconomic status, federal funding, or state funding explained why similar neighboring school districts performed and improved differently. However, local funding proved to separate Category III school districts from districts placed in Categories IV or V. Table 10.16 displayed median income levels, rates of school property taxes, and local funding per pupil.

Table 10.16, Property Tax Rates for Districts by Educational Opportunity Category in Remote Rural Set

	Median Household Income	School Tax Rate	Local Per Pupil Funding
Category III Remote Rural School Districts	\$30,765	6.15%	\$2,391
Category IV Remote Rural School Districts	\$29,493	4.44%	\$1,352
Category V Remote Rural School Districts	\$29,392	5.44%	\$1,444

While Category III districts are not significantly better off economically than their Category IV and Category V counterparts, their counties put a premium on funding their schools.

Another key distinction that emerged at the local level was how party control factors into local education funding. Table 10.9 studied amounts of funding per pupil by party control at the local level.

Table 10.9, Education Funding by County Party Control Among Remote Rural Counties

Control	Local Funding Per Pupil
Republican Judge-Executive (6 of 12)	\$1,637
Republican Fiscal Court (5 of 12)	\$1,433
Democratic Judge-Executive (6 of 12)	\$2,047
Democratic Fiscal Court (7 of 12)	\$2,157

As a whole, counties under Democratic control invested more heavily in their local school districts. This trend is supported by the premium that voters in Eastern Kentucky have put on

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education, which helps explain the deviations in party support between federal, state, and local elections.

As a whole, the responsiveness of county governments to their school districts remains a mixed bag. There are counties in Eastern Kentucky that are falling behind and failing to invest in their schools. Students in McCreary county failed every single eighth grade benchmark and enjoyed a rate of county funding almost \$700 lower than the remote set average (NCES, 2018; Reardon, et al, 2019). School taxes in McCreary County remain low and barriers students face to educational opportunities remain high. Yet, it is not as if the region is without hope. Students in Letcher County failed every single benchmark in fourth grade, yet improved at a rate ten points above the national average in reading and four points above the national average in math (Reardon, et al, 2019). While students started behind in fourth grade, by the time they reached eighth grade, they scored on par with their peers. Although local responsiveness is not great across the board, there are counties leading the way to a better tomorrow for students in Eastern Kentucky.

Corollary Conclusion-I: Not Just “Trump Country”

As Elizabeth Catte emphasized in her *What You’re Getting Wrong About Appalachia*, the Appalachia region is often painted as “Trump country,” and considered a white, conservative monolith (Catte, 2018). As pointed out in various sections of this work, such an assumption is not accurate. Even in counties where Donald Trump won 80 percent of the vote, Democrats still hold all of the county row offices. Eastern Kentucky’s politics are far more complex than one might think, especially at the state and local levels.

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On one hand, yes, support for Donald Trump was incredibly high. Breakdowns of voter data demonstrate that President Trump won 79.27 percent of the vote in the remote rural counties. However, as Tables 9.7 and 9.8 detailed, Eastern Kentucky are ticket-splitters, voting differently at the federal level than they do at the state and local level.

Table 9.7, Democratic Party Performance

Democratic Party Performance	2016 Presidential Election	2019 Gubernatorial Election	2018 Judge-Executive Elections	Variation from Federal to Local Level
Remote Rural Set	17.94%	40.35%	49.79%	+31.85%
Full Dataset	18.80%	40.80%	52.78%	+33.98%

Table 9.8, Republican Party Performance

Republican Party Performance	2016 Presidential Election	2019 Gubernatorial Election	2018 Judge-Executive Elections	Variation from Federal to Local Level
Remote Rural Set	79.27%	56.95%	46.62%	-32.65%
Full Dataset	78.38%	56.79%	41.04%	-37.34%

Yes, the Democratic party in Eastern Kentucky might be different from the Democratic party in Brooklyn, New York; clearly, Eastern Kentucky’s politics are far more nuanced than advertised.

At the state level, Donald Trump’s voters helped elect a Democratic Governor in 2019. At the local level, nearly as many Democrats are county judge-executives as Republicans. Furthermore, in the most local office, officers of the fiscal court, Democrats outnumber

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Republicans 29 to 21 in the remote, rural counties. It is clear that Eastern Kentucky is not the conservative monolith that many perceive the region to be.

Corollary Conclusion-II: Educational Reform Must Begin at the Starting Line

Nationally, much of our current educational discussion is focused on higher education, with debates over free college and loan forgiveness. On one hand, that is to be expected in a competitive democracy. After all, college students tend to cast more votes than kindergarteners. Nonetheless, the idea of “free college for all” does very little to address the inequalities faced by low-income students at the educational starting-line. While making college affordable would help many low-income students, students scoring “below basic” in the NAEP in eighth grade will struggle to get into college in the first place. My research in Chapters Five and Six demonstrates that, in low-income communities, educational inequalities often begin at the starting-line of life. Those inequalities are quantified into test scores in the fourth grade and those achievement gaps are multiplied by eighth-grade.

In order for education to be a “great equalizer,” educational opportunities should be expanded at the starting-line of prenatal care more than the finish line of college. Table 5.3 detailed the struggles of women in the remote counties studied to receive early and regular prenatal care.

Table 5.3: Rate of Mothers Receiving Early and Regular Prenatal Care, 2008-2010

Geographic Area	% of Mothers who received early and regular Prenatal Care
Full Dataset	59.32%
Remote School Districts	58.95%
Rest of Kentucky	65.37%

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Table 5.3 pointed out that over 40 percent of mothers in the remote rural counties do not receive early and regular prenatal care. The lack of prenatal care is a likely cause of why Eastern Kentucky’s children are substantially more likely to be born to a mother who smoked during pregnancy and with a dangerously low birth weight, as demonstrated below.

Table 5.4: Smoking Rates of Pregnant Mothers, 2008-2010

Geographic Area	% of Mothers who smoked during their pregnancy
Full Dataset	36.9%
Remote Rural Set	37.3%
Rest of Kentucky	22.1%
United States Average	23.8%

Table 5.5: Rate of Low Birth Weights, 2008-2010

Geographic Area	% of children with low birth weights
Full Dataset	11.0%
Remote Rural Set	11.5%
Rest of Kentucky	8.5%
United States Average	8.2%

Both smoking rates of mothers and low birth weight are factors shown to have correlated into student performance.

Beyond prenatal care and maternal education, an investment in early childhood education is necessary. Largely as a result of the opioid crisis, more young children in Eastern Kentucky

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are in foster care or being raised by their grandparents. As Robert Putnam pointed out in *Our Kids*, in low-income communities, grandparenting “replace[s] younger, poor, less educated (and now often missing) caregivers with older, poor, less educated caregivers” (Putnam, 2015). Tables 5.9 and 5.10 detail this fact.

Table 5.9: Foster Care Rolls, 2011-2013 and 2016-2018

Geographic Area	% of children living in foster care, 2011-2013	% of children living in foster care, 2016-2018	Change
Full Dataset	4.63%	5.8%	+1.16%
Remote Rural Set	6.2%	6.3%	+0.09%
Rest of Kentucky	3.4%	4.6%	+1.20%
United States	0.5%	0.6%	0.07%

Table 5.10: School Aged Children Living with Grandparents, Census Average 2013-18

Geographic Area	School-aged children living with grandparents	% of students in district living with grandparents
Full Dataset	10,471	14.25%
Remote Rural Set	3,694	18%
Rest of Kentucky	53,345	8.32%
United States	-----	~4.0%

Tables 5.9 and 5.10 show that over 24 percent of students in the remote rural counties lived either in foster care or were being raised by their grandparents. Kentucky has the highest rate of any state in the country where children are living with their grandparents (Gillespie, 2018). Consequently, increasing access to youth literacy and prekindergarten programs is the

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best way to increase educational opportunities at this stage. Educational reform cannot begin with higher education; at least in Eastern Kentucky, starting reforms then is too late for too many children. Currently, 65.9 percent of Kentucky’s rural counties lack an OBGYN (Hung, Kozhimanill, Casey, and Henning-Smith, 2017). That is where educational reform that Eastern Kentucky needs must begin. Eastern Kentucky’s students are behind at the starting-line; these students deserve holistic educational reforms to address the myriad of starting-line inequalities that they face.

Corollary Conclusion-III: Old Fashioned Models of Politics Still Hold Water

An important finding of this work is that while who represents you matters, the positions of power those individuals hold is even more important. Both at the federal and state level, the seemingly old-fashioned political concept of committee assignments still is important. At the federal level, the power Hal Rogers enjoys on the House Appropriations Committee and the power Mitch McConnell holds on Senate Appropriations and as Majority Leader has benefitted Eastern Kentucky. In 2017, Rogers was central in protecting the ARC from President Trump’s proposed budget cuts. In 2020, McConnell led the effort to stop Education Secretary Besty Devos from cutting the Rural Educational Achievement Program grant that benefits Eastern Kentucky’s schools. While Rogers and McConnell may not always vote for Eastern Kentucky’s interests, they used their committee roles and legislative clout to protect two key federal programs.

At the state level, committee assignments continue to matter, especially for school district funding. Table 8.18 demonstrates the power held by representatives with seats on both the

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Education Committee and the Appropriations Subcommittee for Primary and Secondary Education.

Table 8.18, Cross-Section of Seats on “Key Committees” and Opportunity Categories

	No control	Category III	Category IV	Category V
Average Funds Per Pupil	\$7,608	\$7,533	\$7,383	\$7,943
Seat on Education	\$7,573.23	\$7,085.99	\$7,085.99	\$7,849.68
Seats on Education and Appropriations	\$7,679.46	\$7,618.27	\$7,926.00	\$9,025.00
Seats on Neither	\$7,567.63	\$7,426.37	\$7,290.67	\$7,880.83

What committees your representative is on has a significant correlation to how much funding your school district is receiving from the state.

Sunrises and Sunsets: Tomorrow in Appalachia

Anyone who spends time in Appalachia knows of the beauty of the region’s sunrise and sunset. Every morning, the sun slowly climbs over the mountains in the East; the first rays of sunshine cause raindrops to glisten on the grassy dew. To the many people who call Appalachia home, those first beams of sunshine are a daily ray of hope. Yet, as Appalachians would be quick to point out, the Appalachian sunshine, in a way, is double-edged. The ability to cast large shadows is inherent in the nature of any mountain. Even during the time of the day allotted to light, Eastern Kentucky can be home to shadows which broadcast great darkness.

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The Appalachian sunset, however, does not work as many outside observers might think. At the end of day, the sun tucks itself in under Western part of the mountains. However, after the sun sets, Appalachia does experience total darkness. That is because at night, bright stars beam over the Appalachian sky. In Appalachia, one must recognize, acknowledge, and grapple with the darkness of weak schools and dire poverty. However, even in the midst of the darkness of the sky, one still has to look to the light that beams down from the stars. In looking at that starlight comes hope, that one day, Appalachia and its schools will shine brighter.

The depth of the communities within the Appalachian Mountains is difficult to see from the highway. Peaks and valleys obstruct the full nature of the mountains and its people, especially when we only look at the region from a distance. Too often forgotten in the midst of Appalachia’s struggle is how proud Appalachians are of their communities. People in Eastern Kentucky do not hesitate to say they are from Clay County, or Owsley County, or Leslie County. People from Eastern Kentucky will tell you they spent their whole lives there and do so with a smile and sense of pride. That does not mean that Eastern Kentuckians are blind to the poverty and struggle their communities face. The people of Eastern Kentucky know all too well of “the battle for dignity and security” they must wage so that the stars of the sky beam brighter “for themselves and their children” (Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 1975).

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