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THE RESPONSES OF RURAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES TO THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

A Dissertation in
Educational Leadership

by
Ian Burfoot-Rochford

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

I examine in this dissertation, using a three article format, how rural western Pennsylvania districts, communities, and superintendents made sense of and responded to the current opioid epidemic. I conducted extensive fieldwork in rural western Pennsylvania, an area heavily affected by the recent opioid crisis, over the 2017-2018 school year. I examine how economic and educational policies affected the capacity of districts in this region to respond to the opioid crisis and its effects (e.g., the effects of parental substance use disorders on students). I further analyze the ways local residents applied moral valuations associated with rurality and drug addiction to make sense of their own and their community’s responsibility in supporting those addicted to opioids, and how these moral valuations in some instances limited collective resolve to address this crisis. Having examined the broader and local contexts that structure district and local responses to this crisis, I explore the skills and strategies that superintendents have used to work within their contextual opportunities and constraints to implement district responses to this epidemic that support all students. I conclude with a discussion of the policy, theory, and educational practice implications of this research.