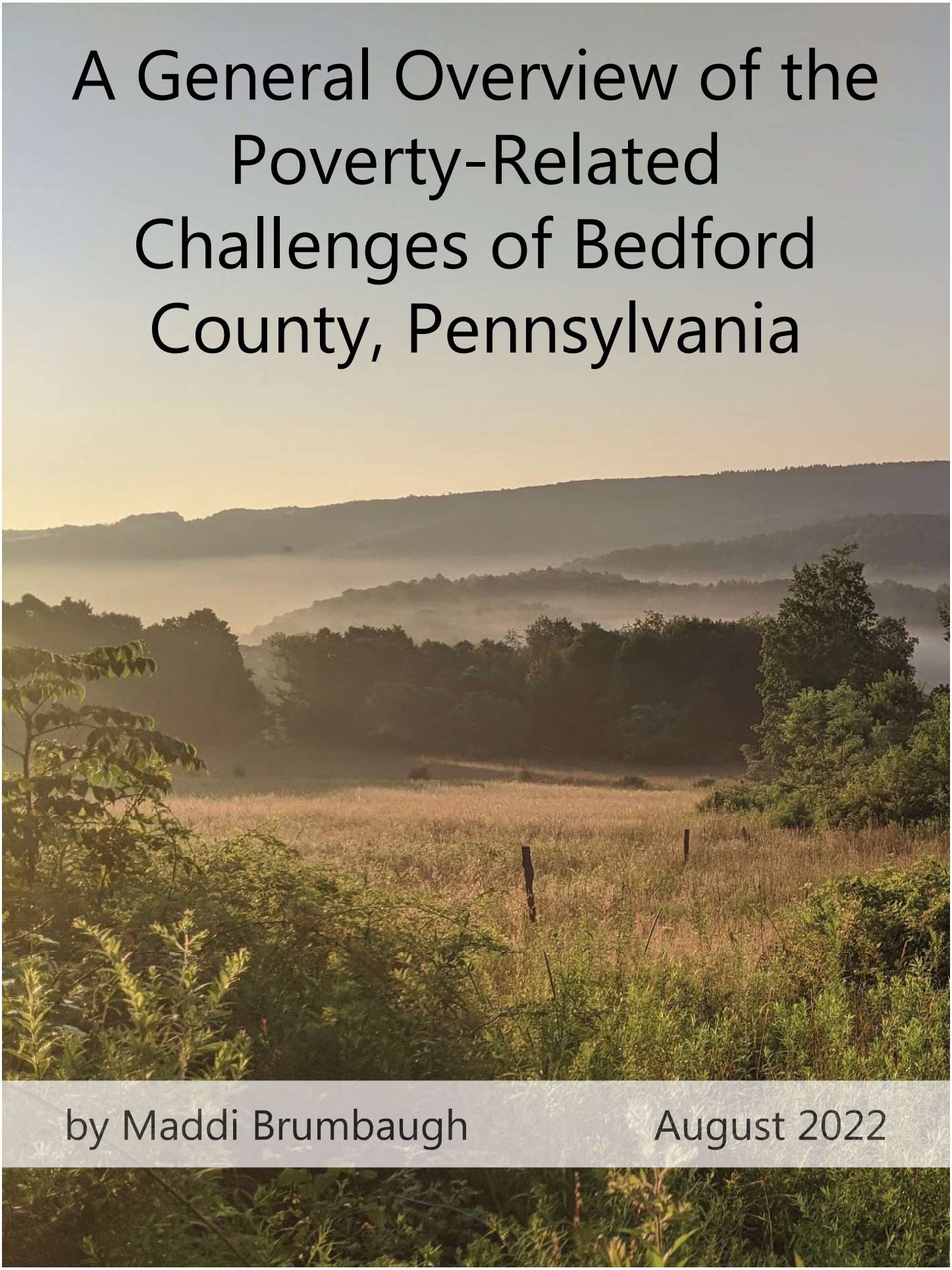
A General Overview of the Poverty-Related Challenges of Bedford County, Pennsylvania



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Preface

As someone who was born and raised in Bedford County but moved away to pursue higher education, my goal with this report is to begin to bridge the gap between my lived experiences and academic knowledge. **What are the most significant poverty-related challenges facing Bedford County, and what are the characteristics of those challenges? How are those challenges interrelated and how do they fit in the context of the lives of Bedford County residents?**

In the course of my research I identified seven interrelated problem areas, five of which align with traditional U.S. government service areas. I identified these categorizations based on a combination of my lived experiences, a review of administrative data relating to Bedford County, and many informational interviews that I conducted with Bedford County community members in the summer of 2022.

Once challenges have been identified and preliminarily understood, the next step for anyone interested in aiding efforts to address those challenges is to identify backbone organizations[1] in the community. These are the potential partners for local anti-poverty initiatives– trusted by residents and knowledgeable about how to conduct service provision in the area. Appendix A provides a concise guide[2] to such organizations in Bedford County.

I also found it worthwhile to zoom in and provide a more in-depth view of what the confluence of Bedford County's challenges and resources look like in one organization or institution. I chose to focus on the public school district in which I grew up, and their efforts to simultaneously provide for both the education and wellbeing of their students. Appendix B explores their recent efforts to those ends.

Introduction

Bedford County is a rural county in South-Central Pennsylvania, in what is culturally considered to be Northern Appalachia. According to U.S. Census data, 47,461 people reside in the 1,012.3 square miles of Bedford County[3], resulting in an average of 46.88 people per square mile. This population density is roughly 1/257th that of Philadelphia[4] and 1/6th that of Pennsylvania's average overall[5].

Bedford County experienced significant waves of development in response to periods of warfare in the early history of the United States. Specific incidents included the 1758 construction of Fort Bedford for use in the French & Indian War and infrastructure to accommodate troop movement and military coordination during the Whiskey Rebellion of the early 1790s. The mining of coal from the county's coal fields also impacted development, as did coal transport west from and through the

1 "What Are Backbone Organizations?"
2 I make no claims to it being comprehensive, but I do believe that it would serve as a good guide to getting started, for anyone looking to add to the anti-poverty efforts of Bedford County.
3 "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Bedford County, Pennsylvania."
4 "Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Population 2022 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)."
5 "Pennsylvania Population 2022 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)."

county via rail to steel mills in Pittsburgh from the late 19th century through to the decline of US coal and steel industries in the mid- to late 20th century. Bedford County was also home to one of the United States' first experimental nuclear generating stations, the Saxton Nuclear Experiment Station, from 1960 to cessation of operations in 1972. Piecemeal cleanup efforts continued after that through to late 2005, when the site was finally declared to be "cleaned up".[6]

In Bedford County, the median income per household is $51,531[7] and the poverty rate is variably reported to be 11.0%[8] or 13.6%[9]. In terms of racial demographics, US Census data reports that 96.7% of the county's residents identify as white alone, not Hispanic or Latino.[10] The size of the county's budget is $23.42 million[11] (see Figure 1). County officials tout that Bedford County has the lowest rate of taxation in PA[12], which meant a county-wide flat property tax rate for residences of 3.725% in 2021[13] and 3.90% in 2022[14].

Figure 1: Summary of the 2022 Proposed Budget for Bedford County, PA (Income)

Fund Balance	$1,250,000
Taxes	$12,690,739
Licenses & Permits	--
Intergovernmental Revenues	$5,141,977
Charges for Services	$2,395,228
Fines & Forfeits	$688,500
Miscellaneous Revenues	$118,062
Other Financing Sources	$387,600
ARPA Reimbursement Grant Funds	$750,000
Total Available for Appropriation	**$23,422,106**

A Bedford County budget income summary by source category, including the total size of the budget. Expenses total to the same amount, resulting in a balanced budget, but are not shown here. This information pertains the the 2022 proposed budget, as of July 2022.

6 "After $75 Million, Nuke Site Clean | Local News | Tribdem.Com."
7 "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Bedford County, Pennsylvania."
8 U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Bedford County, Pennsylvania."
9 Lang, Dallara, and Baughman, "2019 Annual Report," 7.
10 "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Bedford County, Pennsylvania."
11 County of Bedford, PA, "2022 Proposed Budget."
12 Lang, Dallara, and Baughman, "2019 Annual Report," 8.
13 County of Bedford, PA, "2022 Proposed Budget."
14 Bedford County, "Bedford County 2022 Taxable Rates."

Figure 2 depicts Bedford County's standing with regard to the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index measurements, in comparison to the state of Pennsylvania and the United States overall. "The Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) helps identify areas of need in a community. [It was] developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a metric for analyzing population data to identify vulnerable populations."[15] A higher proportion of the population of Bedford County is disabled than those of Pennsylvania or the U.S. overall, and the median age and proportion of residents aged 65+ are both higher in the county than the state. Median income[16] in Bedford County is notably lower than comparative state and national values. Across all categories, the most significant difference is the proportion of the population living in mobile homes: 14.8% of Bedford County residents live in mobile homes, while only 3.9% of Pennsylvanians and 6.2% of U.S. residents overall do so.

Figure 2: Social Vulnerability Index

	United States	Pennsylvania	Bedford County
Total Population	324,697,795	12,791,530	48,337
Median Age	38.1	40.8	46.5
Median Household Income	$62,843	$61,744	$50,509
Below Poverty	13.4%	12.4%	11.9%
Unemployment Rate	5.3%	5.3%	4.5%
Age 65+	15.6%	17.8%	22.2%
Age 17 or Younger	22.6%	20.8%	19.7%
Population with a Disability	12.6%	14.0%	16.5%
Singel-Parent Households	14.0%	26.0%	15.0%
Multi-Unit Structures	3.6%	4.4%	2.5%
Mobile Homes	6.2%	3.9%	14.8%
No Vehicle	8.6%	10.9%	5.4%

Source: CCA 2022 Community Needs Assessment, using U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2015-2019

15 "CCA 2022 Community Needs Assessment," 16.

16 Differing median incomes are reported for Bedford County in the first two figures of this report. This is because Figure 1 draws specifically from the most recent ACS (U.S. Census) data, while Figure 2 derives its value from ACS's official 2015-2019 5-Year Estimates.

Poverty-Related Challenges

Brain Drain

> *"People with the greatest potential leave here and they don't come back. They leave because this place can't serve them well, but without them the area will never become a place that serves anyone well."* [17]

"Brain drain" is commonly considered to be the emigration of highly-trained or intelligent people out of a particular area, and is an effectively self-perpetuating problem. It is the tendency of high-potential individuals to filter out of the local economy and culture, going instead to live and work in places which have already reached the critical mass necessary to build powerful public institutions and flourishing communities. This phenomenon can be observed at many different levels and in many different areas of a society. In Bedford County, it is observable and perhaps most detrimental in the health and social services sector, where there is a lack of qualified therapists capable of addressing the county's social ills and a lack of qualified doctors or medical professionals capable of addressing the area's medical problems. It also affects the local bureaucracy, which must fight to retain its administrators, and local schools, which are experiencing dramatic shortages of educational professionals of all stripes. Overall, the lack of qualified workers also serves to deter companies and institutions that might otherwise strengthen the local economy by establishing local branches or investing in regional initiatives.

Steps are being taken to try to retain competent members of the workforce and prevent further outflow, but it's an uphill battle for an area with a relatively small budget and no urban infrastructure. According to the 2019 Bedford County Commissioners' annual report, "The Bedford County Commissioners continue to work towards exploring strategies to ensure starting salaries are competitive to help reduce turnover and to provide sustainable income for employees and their families. This helps to keep training costs low and to attract and retain high quality employees."[18] To these same ends, the Bedford County salary board passed a resolution in 2022 to provide a cost of living adjustment to county employees. The language of the resolution included descriptions of the brain drain challenge facing the region, explicitly including the following three points:

- The labor market throughout the Bedford County region has reflected a shortage of applicants to fill critical vacancies.
- Numerous individuals are departing Bedford County employment for significantly higher paying jobs.
- The average salary of Bedford County Employees is far below the average county per-capita personal income.[19]

Separately, the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce is pursuing initiatives to combat the problem of brain drain by making it easier to start and maintain small businesses. Their website states, "We are

17 (Bedford County social worker), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
18 Lang, Dallara, and Baughman, "2019 Annual Report," 37.
19 Bedford County Salary Board, "COLA Resolution."

working hard to ensure that more Bedford County students can find job opportunities and successful careers locally, rather than moving away to larger communities."[20]

It has long been thought that rural communities contribute to their own decline by encouraging high-achieving youth to leave home in pursuit of greater potential for upward socioeconomic mobility in metropolitan areas. However, recent research suggests that "among the strongest predictors of student plans to leave their communities is economic opportunity. . . [C]ommunity poverty alone does not appear to have a sizeable or statistically significant association with students' residential aspirations. Rather, it is student perceptions of employment opportunities that differentiate Leavers from Stayers."[21]

Regardless of cause, brain drain is a process that fuels itself once it has begun. The ongoing loss of a large proportion of those who become qualified enough to seek higher incomes and greater access to amenities in other areas propagates the continuance of the trend itself. Disruption necessitates significant intervention, and in the meantime brain drain contributes to many other problems in the Bedford County area.

Misalignment of U.S. Administrative Definitions to Lived Experiences

"Most poverty-related stuff happens informally around here-- it doesn't map to official administrative or public governance [protocols]. When there's domestic violence or a kid is kicked out of their house, they often don't go into the foster care system but instead stay with friends or family indefinitely– often across multiple households, depending on days of the week or time of year. It makes it hard to access programs that are exclusively for people who are officially designated. If we had more programs that were more accessible, like maybe a youth mentorship program that was open to anyone who wanted it, I think there would be a good amount of engagement and it would be very helpful for our communities. Adding barriers or qualifying criteria to programs doesn't have the effect of safeguarding them from exploitation by affluent people with lower need so much as [it has the effect of] keeping the most marginalized, invisible people from getting help.

"Another example of this is families who become homeless– they don't go to a homeless shelter or public housing– we don't even have those things– but instead usually spend the warmer months in a camper and the colder months living in someone's living room, often across county or state lines. Greater program flexibility or inter-agency integration would lead to much more effective poverty interventions." [22]

In addition to brain drain, another problem that is powerful, complicated and inextricably linked with most of the other challenges in the Bedford County area is that of the disparity between prevailing

20 Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, "Business & Industry."
21 Petrin, Schafft, and Meece, "Educational Sorting and Residential Aspirations Among Rural High School Students."
22 (Bedford County social worker), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.

U.S. culture and norms and Appalachian culture and norms. As most governing policies are written by non-Appalachians, legal and administrative definitions often struggle to deal with the on-the-ground realities of the region. Similarly to many immigrant communities in the U.S., Appalachia is a high-context culture[23], marked by strong community cohesion, communal resource allocation and the sharing of responsibilities. Comparatively, broader U.S. culture is more individualistic and tends to center on the idea of the nuclear family and the single-family household.

One of the greatest points of friction when administering policies in Appalachia comes from the definition of a "household" and its use as a basis of analysis for tax and administrative purposes. Being both low-income and highly communal, Appalachian communities such as those in Bedford County tend to have more fluid ideas and practices surrounding where to live and whom to call family. This is of particular consequence when barriers to access assistance programs are placed in accordance with these ill-fitting administrative designations. When qualification depends on categorization in such a way that very few will identify with, program uptake and efficacy are severely hampered.[24,25]

One drug and alcohol counselor discussed the complicated reality of interfacing with federal and state bureaucratic systems that do not tend to encompass the needs and experiences of Bedford County residents:

> We get people in here all the time who aren't on MA [medical assistance] because they're either doing 'too well' right now and make just a little too much money to qualify or because their situation is complicated and they've fallen through the cracks. For example, you need to be able to list a permanent address in order to apply for MA and there's a separate application and program for each county; so if you're couch surfing or living out of your truck or your wife or parents kicked you out until you clean up or you just moved from one county to another but have to wait months for the administrative stuff to go through, you probably are just missing out on access and there's nothing you can do. I feel really lucky that we [at PSI[26]] have some funding to assist people in situations like that, but it doesn't fix everything. [27]

The fundamental undermining of program effectiveness highlighted in the examples above is a common thread across most service areas. Until U.S. policy architecture becomes more sensitive to and accommodating of diverse domestic realities, or until any and all such diversity is eradicated or subsumed by the dominant U.S. norms, this friction will persist in undermining any efforts to serve marginalized populations.

23 Hall, The Silent Language.
24 Herd and Moynihan, *Administrative Burden: Policymaking by Other Means*.
25 In the Healthcare section of this report, I go into more detail about how challenges like these affect navigation of the common Pennsylvania service/assistance application portal, COMPASS.
26 Personal Solutions, Inc. (PSI) is an organization which offers drug and alcohol addiction education, treatment and referral services out of their Bedford, PA office.
27 (Drug and alcohol addiction counselor at PSI), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.

Transportation

> *"I'd say transportation is a lynchpin problem in Bedford County. Lack of transportation is a huge barrier for struggling and marginalized people. Everything here is so far apart that people are very isolated if they can't get around."* [28]

All interviewees represented in this report, regardless of their area of expertise, mentioned transportation as one of the key challenges of living in Bedford County. Human service professionals, especially, highlighted it as a distinct barrier for anti-poverty efforts. Upstream, transportation limitations largely tie back to funding. The ratio of taxable households to miles of road requiring upkeep is much lower in rural areas than in more densely populated regions. Recent research by the nonprofit Strong Towns shows that most rural areas in the U.S. are not able to meet their own funding needs for basic infrastructure such as road maintenance, and instead rely on redistributed funds from urban centers in their states[29].

Bedford County, being a rural county, has extremely limited public-access transportation infrastructure or programming. There are no buses or trains or ride-share programs. The only option for non-drivers and those without access to a private vehicle is a program provided by the local Area Agency on Aging called CART, which must be scheduled at least one business day in advance between 8am and 2pm, is subsidized only for Medicare and Medicaid recipients (for anyone else each leg of a journey costs $20), and often requires significant flexibility of scheduling (sometimes on the scale of multiple hours) around pickup and dropoff times due to limited availability.[30] Transportation assistance for low-income individuals and/or families also exists in the form of a funding assistance program from the Center for Community Action (CCA), where CCA can help people purchase (up to $2,000) or repair (up to $1,000) vehicles, but this is specifically limited to those with incomes of 125% or less of the federal poverty line.[31] The challenge of transportation is especially acute and relevant in Bedford County because of the broad dispersion of communities; for example, some residents are a 45 minute drive (or a much longer school bus ride) away from the nearest high school. Furthermore, commutes to employment or healthcare are often particularly long, as they are not determined by proximity to household.

Personal transportation is limited in Bedford County due to the high costs of purchasing and maintaining vehicles. Exposure to snow and salt from roads during the winters in Bedford County accelerates vehicle degradation. Additionally, many residents' driver's licenses have been suspended or revoked due to DUI charges and convictions.[32] (The lack of public transportation and ride-share programs, combined with few community recreation options outside of bars, exacerbate the problem of drunk driving.) Whatever the cause, once an individual's ability to drive freely has been restricted or cut off, virtually every aspect of their life is affected. Lack of access to transportation results in a lack

28 (Drug and alcohol addiction counselor at PSI), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
29 Marohn, *Strong Towns: A Bottom-up Revolution to Rebuild American Prosperity.*
30 "Transportation | CART | Huntingdon-Bedford-Fulton Area Agency on Aging."
31 "Vehicle Assistance Program."
32 DUIs are discussed in greater depth in a later section of this report.

of access to employment and healthcare, which feeds the lack of access to transportation in a self-perpetuating feedback loop.

Housing

> *"There just isn't housing stock for people to use if they need to move for any reason. What are working class people going to do– leave their lives behind to pick up and move to a nearby area with a higher cost of living when they're already struggling to get by in one of the most affordable counties in our region?* [33]

Access

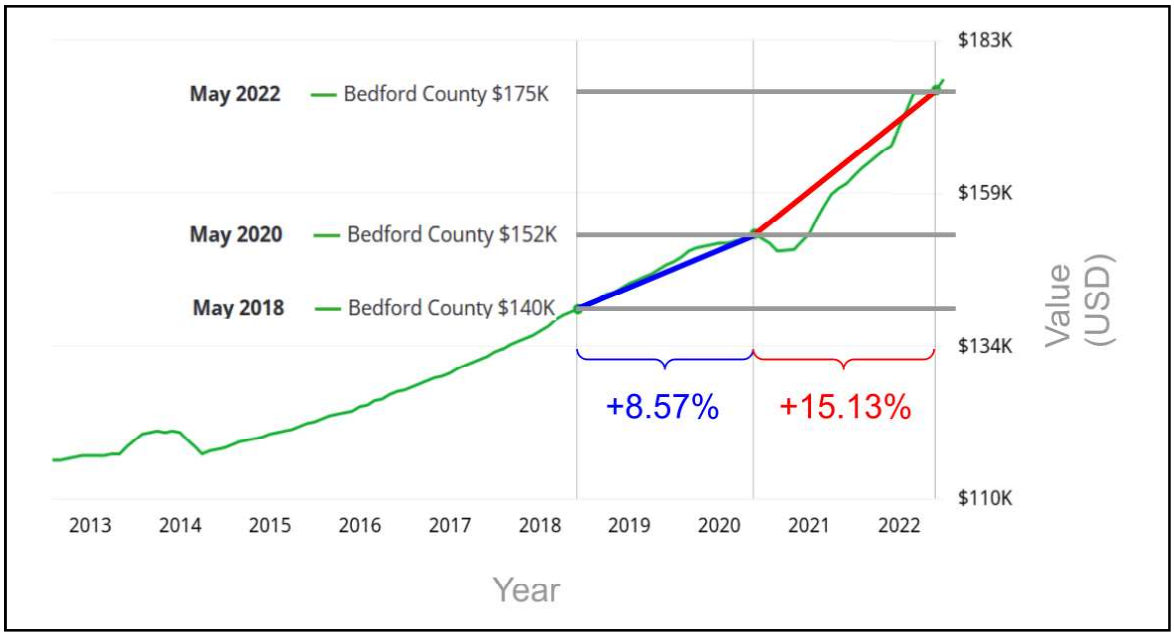
When asked to describe the poverty-related housing access challenges of Bedford County, a housing program specialist at the Center for Community Access responded, "Lack of affordable, low income housing and apartment buildings. This has been the case for years, due to rich out-of-towners purchasing land to build summer and vacation homes near Lake Raystown, but has become worse since COVID." [34]

Lack of accessible housing is indeed an increasing problem in Bedford County, caused in part by a huge wave of home purchases that occurred during the pandemic when residents of nearby metropolitan areas moved to Bedford County. One real estate agent working out of Bedford, PA had this to say: "I'd estimate that 90-95% of my sales since the pandemic began have been to out-of-towners. We're close enough to D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh– and highways connecting us– that the added flexibility [of being allowed to work from home part or all of the time] was all it took to have those markets spill into ours."[35] Regarding pre-pandemic growth patterns in property value, the real estate agent noted that prices had already been on the rise due to growing demand in recent years for agricultural-use land by farmers being pushed out of the Lancaster area as it develops and gentrifies.

According to Zillow's Home Value Index, the average housing value in Bedford County over the two year preceding the pandemic (May 2018 to May 2020) rose 8.57% ($140k to $152k); in the period of time since the pandemic's effects began to be felt in Bedford County (May 2020 to May 2022), values have risen 15.13% ($152k to $175k).[36] These rates are depicted in Figure 3. The current state of the housing market in Bedford County is such that home purchases are inaccessible to local residents. Combined with a severely constrained rental market and the fact that costs of living are higher in virtually every other area of the U.S., this effectively traps residents in an ecosystem with very few housing options.

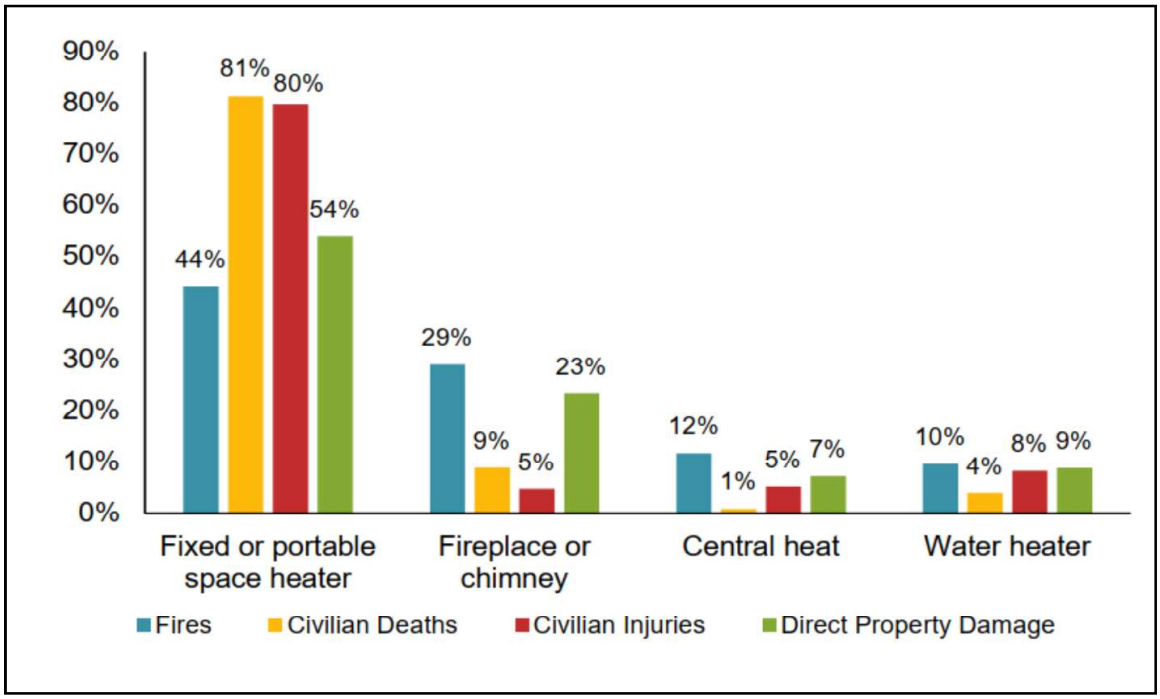
33 (Bedford County real estate agent), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
34 (Representatives of CCA), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
35 (Bedford County real estate agent), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
36 Inc, "Bedford County PA Home Prices & Home Values."

Figure 3: Zillow's Home Value Index of Bedford County Home Values Over Time



Bedford County home values over time (2013 - 2022). Source: Zillow's Home Value Index.

Figure 4: Home Fires Involving Heating Equipment by Type of Equipment, 2014-2018 Annual Averages



A bar graph of home fire rates according to heating equipment utilized, including information on rates of civilian deaths, civilian injuries and property damage.

House Fires

House fires contribute in their own way, less common but more devastating, to the housing problem in the area. Many homes in Bedford County have outdated knob and tube wiring systems which are not grounded and therefore quite dangerous.[37] Additionally, due to the high costs of heating homes throughout the winter, households often resort to using some form of space heater to heat smaller areas at a time and/or wood or coal furnaces[38] to utilize lower-cost fuel sources. Figure 4 depicts information about national rates of home fires relative to heating sources, according to the National Fire Protection Agency.[39] Another important factor relating to home fires is that all fire companies in Bedford County are volunteer-based, responsible for large areas, and are usually staffed on an on-call basis rather than an on-duty basis. Emergency calls are routed through dispatchers and volunteers are alerted to report to their station and subsequently deploy. The Bedford Fire Co., for example, is responsible for the 147 square miles surrounding the city of Bedford and reports having responded to 175 fires in the first six months of 2022 alone.[40,41] Outdated wiring systems, unsafe heating sources and the nature of rural firefighting all combine to result in a perilous house fire threat in Bedford County.

Homelessness

With the exception of one domestic violence shelter for women and children[42], Bedford County has no homeless shelters. Traditionally in the area, homelessness has most commonly existed in the form of cohabitation of extended families in a single residence. Social workers, employees at local human service organizations, and teachers interviewed for this report described recently encountering a significant increase in numbers of families living out of their vehicles or in derelict RVs and mobile homes, almost always without access to running water or safe and reliable heat. Homelessness serves as a significant barrier in the process of connecting residents with human services, and also in maintaining those services continuously. People often move from place to place (especially seasonally, according to weather) when they have no permanent home.

Crossing county lines usually means crossing into a different service jurisdiction, leading to a complete disruption of services. A lack of permanent address also prevents people from being able to fill out many of the administrative forms (especially online forms[43]) used in poverty-alleviation program applications. In these ways, homeless individuals and families are effectively barred from the government's own homelessness amelioration initiatives by inefficient government bureaucracy. Though rural homelessness doesn't present in the same way as the more visible and stereotypical urban homelessness, it is a significant and equally legitimate challenge.[44,45]

37 Boggs, "Is Knob and Tube Wiring Safe?"
38 Wood and coal furnaces produce buildup that needs to be cleaned regularly by technicians in order to prevent house fires.
39 Campbell, "Home Heating Fires."
40 "Bedford Fire Department No. 1 Inc."
41 "Bedford Fire Department No. 1 Inc. - Call Volume."
42 "Your Safe Haven."
43 Online forms commonly completely block application progression until all required fields are filled to the exact specifications of the website.
44 Meehan, "Unsheltered And Uncounted."
45 "Rural Homelessness."

Employment

> *"You're not gonna get your higher-end middle class jobs here. The only hope you have in this area of being more economically secure is starting a business, but that's a risk because pretty much all the clients and customers are low-income."* [46]

A large proportion of the Bedford County population of employable age is "Not in the Labor Force." According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "This category includes retired persons, students, those taking care of children or other family members, and others who are neither working nor seeking work." As shown below in Figure 5, Bedford County's labor force participation rates lag notably in comparison to those of Pennsylvania and the nation overall. One important side effect of this is that more frequently referenced "unemployment" statistics for the region are often on par with wider averages, obfuscating the reality that many in Bedford County are not employed and do not report seeking employment.

Figure 5: Labor Statistics

	Bedford County	Pennsylvania	United States
% of Population Not in Labor Force	42.2%[48]	37.3%[49]	37.0%[50]
% of Population Unemployed	4.3%[51]	4.5%[52,53]	3.6%[54]
% of Population Employed	53.5%	58.2%	59.4%

A table displaying comparative rates of being "not in the labor force," "unemployed" and "employed" in Bedford County, Pennsylvania, and the U.S.

Barriers to gaining and maintaining employment in the area are significant. Many positions do not pay enough to do more than cover costs for gasoline and vehicle maintenance, given the previously discussed realities of commuting in Bedford County. DUIs, criminal history, and drug use, discussed in greater depth later in this report, also play a role in barring people from employment opportunities. Childcare is primarily provided by family members rather than professional childcare centers, with schools playing a major de facto role as childcare providers for working parents.[47] Childcare assistance is available to especially low-income parents through organizations such as the Center for Community Action[48], but availability is extremely limited and commutes are often prohibitive.

In terms of what employment opportunities are available, Bedford County's economy is primarily built around 1) tourism, especially historic and rural tourism, and 2) warehousing and distribution of commercial goods, as the area is a relatively central point between large, eastern metropolitan centers such as New York, Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia and more western locations like Pittsburgh

46 (PA State police officer and Bedford County business owner), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.

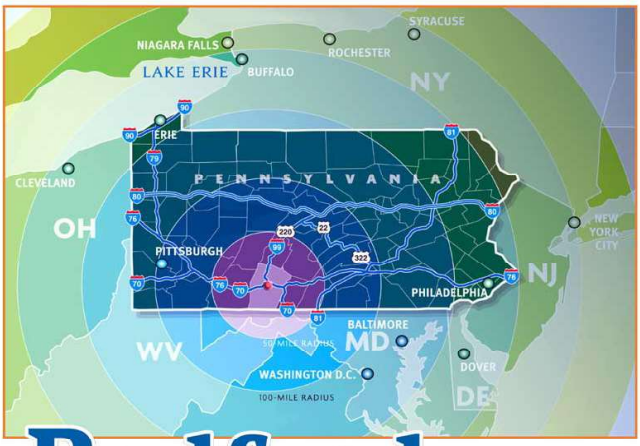
47 In Bedford County, many parents' perceptions of schools as little more than childcare centers are often both explicitly and implicitly communicated in interactions between families and educators. This frequently leads to significant friction between individuals, and also affects the work of schools in communities. Further examination of this is available in Appendix B of this report.

48 "Subsidized Child Daycare."

and Cleveland. A map and list of relevant distances are depicted in Figure 6. The county's top two employers, Walmart and REI,[49] run major warehouses/distribution centers out of Bedford County. The county's Chamber of Commerce website has this to say about it:

> Logistics businesses provide jobs for hundreds of people in our community, ranging from small independent trucking firms to large distribution warehouses. The first large distribution center to open here was Walmart, which is located near Cessna. Today, warehousing and logistics facilities are among our largest employers. REI's distribution center, located in BCDA's Business Park II, which offers easy access to Interstate 99, is expanding their local operations to a 24/7 schedule. The logistics and transportation sector employs nearly 2,100 people, representing 13.7% of local employment – compared with just 5.6% for the state of Pennsylvania.[50]

Figure 6: Bedford County Strategic Location Map



Bedford County's Strategic Location

CITY & DISTANCE (MILES)

Baltimore, MD	143	Montreal, CAN	569
Buffalo, NY	244	New York, NY	270
Charleston, WV	257	Philadelphia, PA	203
Chicago, IL	561	Pittsburgh, PA	107
Cincinnati, OH	375	Rochester, NY	310
Cleveland, OH	233	Syracuse, NY	314
Detroit, MI	386	Toronto, CAN	342
Harrisburg, PA	102	Washington, D.C.	141

A depiction of Bedford County's proximity to notable destinations in the region.

Troublingly, having Walmart as the largest employer in any community bodes poorly for the community's health, as the company is notorious for under-providing for employees to the point that they must rely on public assistance.[51,52] However, as discussed in this report, public assistance programs in Bedford County are already inadequate relative to residents' needs.

Other large employers in the county include public school districts and a few manufacturing companies. Low paying positions such as home health aides, retail employees and service workers are also common, yet offer little room for advancement or growth. Due at least in part to lack of employment diversity in Bedford County, many residents work for employers outside of the county, doing work that involves significant regional and/or national travel. Most common amongst these positions are truck driving, construction and public utility work. See Figures 7 and 8 for more information.

49 PA Center for Workforce Information & Analysis, "Top 50 Employers & Industries in Bedford County, PA."
50 Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, "Transportation and Logistics."
51 O'Connor, "Report: Walmart Workers Cost Taxpayers $6.2 Billion In Public Assistance."
52 Miao, "Walmart and McDonald's Are among Top Employers of Medicaid and Food Stamp Beneficiaries, Report Says."

Figure 7: Top 50 Employers in Bedford County

Bedford County **4th Quarter, 2021**

Combined Government Ownerships

Rank	Employer	Rank	Employer
1	Wal-Mart Associates Inc	26	Federal Government
2	Recreational Equipment Inc	27	Ruggieri Enterprises
3	State Government	28	Delamor Enterprises LP
4	New Enterprise Stone & Lime Company	29	American Hardwood Industries LLC
5	Omni Bedford Springs Resort	30	B C Stone Inc
6	Rockland Inc	31	Weis Markets Inc
7	JLG Industries Inc	32	Penn Knoll Village
8	UPMC Bedford Corp	33	Blue Knob All Seasons Resort
9	Bedford Area School District	34	Lampire Biological Labs Inc
10	John Corle Companies Inc	35	Bedford-Somerset DBHS
11	Chestnut Ridge School District	36	Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministry
12	Kennametal Inc	37	Mission Critical Solutions LLC
13	Bedford County Commissioners	38	Clark Contractors Inc
14	Captive-Aire Systems Inc	39	Dolgencorp LLC
15	Creative Pultrusions Inc	40	Jean Bonnet Tavern
16	Green Leaf Medicals LLC	41	Everett Foodliner
17	Everett Area School District	42	Heartland Employment Services LLC
18	Aerotek Inc	43	Saxton Market
19	Tussey Mountain School District	44	Maxwell Transportation
20	SAC Inc	45	UPMC Community Medicine Inc
21	Northern Bedford County School District	46	Learning Lamp Inc
22	Bedford Reinforced Plastics Inc	47	Thomas Chevrolet
23	Defiance Metal Products of PA Inc	48	Applegreen USA Welcome Centers
24	Sheetz Inc	49	Hoss's Restaurant
25	Gateway Travel Plaza	50	Ridgetop Orchards LLC

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

Center for Workforce Information & Analysis

(877) 4WF-DATA • www.workstats.dli.pa.gov • workforceinfo@pa.gov

May 2022

Employers in Bedford County, listed in order of number of employees. Source: PA Center for Workforce Information & Analysis

Figure 8: Total Population by Industry

	United States	Pennsylvania	Bedford County
Employed Population, 16 +	259,662,880	10,442,963	40,088
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1.8%	1.3%	3.9%
Construction	6.6%	5.8%	9.3%
Manufacturing	10.1%	11.8%	13.5%
Wholesale trade	2.6%	2.7%	3.0%
Retail trade	11.2%	11.2%	12.5%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	5.4%	5.6%	8.5%
Information	2.0%	1.6%	0.8%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	6.6%	6.4%	2.6%
Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management services	11.6%	10.5%	6.0%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	23.1%	25.9%	19.9%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	9.7%	8.3%	10.3%
Other services, except public administration	4.9%	4.7%	5.5%
Public administration	4.6%	4.0%	4.2%

Comparative population proportions of residents of the U.S., Pennsylvania, and Bedford County, organized by industry category. Source: 2022 CCA Community Needs Assessment

The Local Tourism Economy

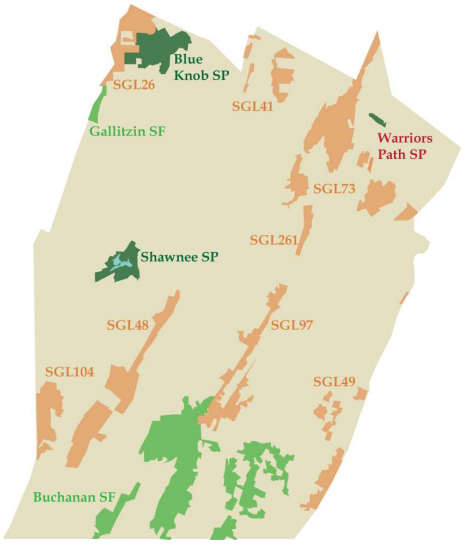
Other significant sources of employment opportunities in Bedford County are those that are seasonal and tourist-driven. The county capitalizes on the close proximity of Raystown Lake, a regional tourist destination, as well as many historic sites, including taverns and covered bridges, that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.[53] There even exists a period-specific reenactment village, Old Bedford Village[54,55], which celebrates the long history of Western settlement in the county. The rurality of Bedford County attracts many tourists seeking respite from urban living, especially to the Bedford Springs Hotel, which was used as the "summer White House" by the James Buchanan administration and, after acquisition by Omni Resorts and a $55,000,000 renovation[56], is now an attractive destination for those who can afford it. The verdant Appalachian forests attract some ecotourism and hunting tourism; as depicted in Figure 9, Bedford County is home to three state parks, two state forests, and eight state game land areas, all of which are open to the public for hunting during various hunting seasons.[57]

The local tourism economy is not necessarily beneficial to residents, however. As discussed in the Housing section of this report, real estate prices have already risen in Bedford County to such an

53 "Pennsylvania (U.S. National Park Service)."
54 "Old Bedford Village."
55 "Old Bedford Village."
56 "Pennsylvania (U.S. National Park Service)."
57 "Hunting in Bedford County."

extent that access to housing has been severely restricted for local residents. Prices at many shops and restaurants, as well, are tailored to tourists rather than residents. As one Bedford County resident put it, "It seems like all of [the city of] Bedford is targeting non-locals as their consumers, effectively putting shops and restaurants out of reach for locals."[58] This has led to resentment on the part of residents, who are experiencing restriction in access to the few amenities they have been able to enjoy. Though their socioeconomic class has often constrained their ability to afford luxury consumer goods and travel experiences, residents have long taken solace in the access that their proximity has granted them to outdoor activities such as camping, boating, fishing, and hunting. In recent years, however, many campsites have been reserved months in advance, and housing stock is increasingly being converted to Airbnbs. Boat launches in Bedford County rivers that connect to Raystown Lake have sometimes been backed up in hours-long lines on summer days. Wildlife populations in local rivers, lakes, and forests have to be carefully monitored and portioned off via a limited number of purchasable game licenses that are sometimes hotly contested.

Figure 8: Public Lands



Bedford County's public lands. Source: Bedford County Visitors Bureau.

While these problems have not yet reached the breaking point, they are trending toward negative outcomes for local residents. Literature suggests that putting carefully-crafted policies in place to protect and support the local population is necessary for growing a healthy local tourism economy.[59,60]

58 (PA state police officer and Bedford County business owner), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.

59 "The elephant in the rural tourism room is the problem of reduced housing opportunities for local people in attractive rural tourism areas. . . There has been, in many rural areas, strong opposition to tourism because of the impact of rising house prices on local people, particularly its impacts on lower paid people. This can be an intensely discussed political issue. There has been little objective research into how to solve the complex issues involved. Four possible ways forward might help, but all have problems, and should be carefully researched: (1) Increase agricultural prosperity to allow the payment of higher wages; (2) Build low-cost quality housing reserved for lower paid local people; (3) Build locally owned and managed eco-hotels. . . (4) Build small-scale locally owned housing for visitors. . . This problem adds to the case for the better management of sustainable rural tourism. It is a special challenge to protected area planning and management. Academics have known about it for at least 30 years. However, few solutions have been adopted or tested widely." (Lane, Kastenholz, and Carneiro, "Rural Tourism and Sustainability.")

60 "Renewed focus on the improvement of the quality of life of the individuals that constitute the community in such a way that it ensures survival of local culture and its artifacts is imparitive [sic] for rural tourism. Inappropriate Tourism development can destroy the very 'sense of place' that made or may have made a rural community a successful tourism destination. More importantly, improper development can lead to the destruction of the social fabric of the community, the loss of property and life, increased crime, elevated cost of living, displacements of local citizens from their family property, and destruction of historical buildings and local customs. Conversely, tourism development can, if correctly planned and managed, provide the basis for the improvement of the 'quality of life' related attributes such as health services, transportation facilities, educational opportunities, recreation amenities, historic preservation, and cultural celebrations that are desired by every community." (Potts et al., "Issues in Rural Community Tourism Development.")

Law Enforcement: Crime, Incarceration, Parole & Probation

> *"A lot of our crime is the result of a downward spiral of unemployment from our weak economy leading to increased alcohol use, which often leads to drug use, which eventually leads to crimes like stealing, DUIs, and selling drugs. But if people go back to work, it turns everything around. I believe you can fix crime rates by getting people access to decent jobs."*[61]

DUIs

Given the lack of public transportation and significant distances between destinations, it follows that driving as a means of travel is both common and necessary in Bedford County. This is even the case when traveling to and from bars for social drinking, a popular form of recreation in the area. One state police officer based out of Bedford County said, "In our area, there's nothing to do but drink. Bars and parties are pretty much the only option for recreation and socialization."[62] According to Bedford County Prothonotary records, there were 185 DUI cases registered with the Courthouse in the 2021 calendar year– an average of 3.6 cases per week; so far in 2022 (Jan 1 to July 18), there have been 92 DUI (averaging 3.3 per week).[63] Concerning the current state of affairs concerning DUI perpetration and prosecution, one state police officer had this to say:

> Norms have shifted from the previous generation, when drinking and driving was accepted. Now people—especially young people—generally take it more seriously, and they know that the law and law enforcement take it seriously, too. So alcohol-related DUIs are much rarer nowadays, but we're getting a lot of drug DUIs—not just marijuana but a lot of other drugs like fentanyl and meth and heroin. [64]

Marijuana is still classified as a schedule 1 drug in Pennsylvania, meaning it shares legal categorization with heroin. Even traffic stops involving sober drivers pulled over for traffic infractions or having a tail light out sometimes lead to arrests for paraphernalia and subsequent drug testing. Problematically, marijuana is indicated in drug tests as being present in one's system long after its effects have worn off.[65] As one man who was convicted of DUI in Bedford County put it:

> I'd estimate that 80% of the people who were in the Bedford County Jail when I was there were in for DUIs, like me. I even met quite a few people who were just traveling through the county from places where weed is legal and had small items of paraphernalia in the car that would typically be overlooked anywhere else, but

61 (PA State police officer and Bedford County business owner), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
62 (PA State police officer and Bedford County business owner), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
63 Bedford County Prothonotary, "3802 Log."
64 (PA State police officer and Bedford County business owner), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
65 "How Long Does Marijuana Stay in Your System?"

> they were caught up in our county's aggressive policing and their lives were turned upside down. [66]

In addition to making DUIs more likely in the first place, lack of public transportation and significant distances between destinations also exacerbate the negative effects of DUI charges for Bedford County residents. Without a driver's license, it's challenging to follow the steps necessary to have one's license restored, including court appearances, mandatory classes, and oftentimes meetings with counselors and officials. Further complicating matters, it's nearly impossible to maintain employment in Bedford County without a driver's license. Residents charged with DUIs who don't have the social resources to mitigate the loss of their license often face the choice of losing their jobs and falling into noncompliance with respect to their fines and legal fees, or else driving illegally while their license is suspended and risking arrest and further charges. The result is that already-marginalized and tenuously-stable people experience significant downward socioeconomic pressure with no realistic path out of the cycle.

Parole & Probation

To fully understand problems related to parole and probation (otherwise known as criminal supervision) in Bedford County, it is necessary to first understand higher-level policies. Pennsylvania allows unlimited sentences of parole and probation, including multiple life sentences. Nearly a third of the state's approximately 50,000 prison beds are occupied by individuals who entered or re-entered the correctional system due to having violated parole or probation.[67] "In Pennsylvania, rule violations comprised 41% of prison admissions for state parole violations and 78% of probation revocations from 2016 to 2019."[68] Violations are frequently accrued due to technicalities or exceedingly minor infractions, such as failing to report a change of address.[69] Those sentenced to parole or probation must pay for the costs of their involvement in the system, often including paying for the costs of any drug tests their parole/probation officers order. "Many people cannot afford to pay their supervision fees or other court costs while supporting themselves and their families. As a result, people often do not make their required payments. While the US Supreme Court forbids courts from jailing people solely because they are poor, judges often fail to adequately assess whether someone can pay."[70] A 2018 PEW report estimated that only about half of all people who are sentenced to parole or probation in the United States ever exit criminal supervision.[71]

Bedford County has the highest per capita rate of active[72] criminal supervision in Pennsylvania, at a rate of 29.49 per 1000 residents.[73] Though individuals involved in criminal supervision have the right to apply to move to a new jurisdiction if they have good reason, such as having been offered a job elsewhere, the Bedford County Parole & Probation office has a local reputation of being particularly

66 (Drug and alcohol addiction counselor at PSI), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
67 The Council of State Governments Justice Center, "Justice Reinvestment in Pennsylvania Policy Framework," 1.
68 "Revoked: How Probation and Parole Feed Mass Incarceration in the United States," 5-6.
69 Melamed, "Pennsylvania Parole Violations Drive Prison Population, Human Rights Watch Report Shows."
70 "Revoked: How Probation and Parole Feed Mass Incarceration in the United States," 6.
71 The PEW Charitable Trusts, "Probation and Parole Systems Marked by High Stakes, Missed Opportunities," 9.
72 "Active Offender" is defined as an offender that is required to report to a county probation and parole department either in person, by telephone, by mail, email, or other means. Such "actively-supervised" offenders comprise a county's "active caseload".
73 The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, "PA CAPP 2020 Caseload Statistics Report," 9.

unwilling to grant any requests.[74] Residents living under criminal supervision face all the same challenges relating to transportation, employment opportunities and access to services as other Bedford County residents, with additional risk of criminal punishment if anything goes wrong.

Healthcare: Health & Access

> *I think the people in our area lack education about health, so they don't seek medical care when they should. Also, there aren't many resources or services available in Bedford County, so a lot of people have to go farther away to seek care. Medical costs, travel costs, travel time, and the burden of getting referrals and prior [authorizations] and making appointments all combine to be enough to make appropriate care inaccessible for most people. With the lack of preventative care comes more emergency medical situations, but all of our EMTs are local volunteers who take a long time to arrive from far-away stations. I would love for them to mandate CPR and BLS [basic life support] education in schools as part of the local high school education. I think that would lead to a lot more health awareness.*[75]

Access

Although Bedford County is home to one hospital, almost all acute, life-threatening cases are life-flighted to Pittsburgh, a major healthcare hub about a three hour drive west of Bedford County. Most specialized care also requires traveling to Pittsburgh. In this we see that transportation barriers are exceedingly relevant to healthcare access rates. One Bedford County doctor spoke to this, saying, "So many patients can't get to appointments or treatment because of lack of transportation. When they can get [to healthcare appointments] at all, the delays and interruptions in care caused by inconsistent or unreliable access to transportation exacerbate problems already faced by the poorest patients who struggle to afford their medication or healthy food."

Chronic lack of access to adequate healthcare has been an issue in the county, largely related to lack of health insurance. The American Community Survey's 2021 estimate of "Percentage of persons without health insurance under age 65 years" was 8.4% of the population; PLACES Age-Adjusted 2019 survey result data reported that the rate of "Current lack of health insurance among adults aged 18-64 years" is 12.6%.[76] Pennsylvania's Medicaid application, along with applications for most other assistance programs, is accessed via an online portal called COMPASS[77], which poses many barriers for applicants. In addition to introducing technological skill requirements, moving the primary application portal online has narrowed the range of acceptable inputs in such a way that prevents utilization in many of the highest-need cases. In situations where the online form won't accept what the applicant considers to be the only true or possible answer to a question[78], the applicant is simply not permitted to proceed. There's no way to ask for clarification or assistance other than to travel to a DHS office

74 Bedford County Parole and Probation did not respond to requests for comments.
75 (Nurse in the Bedford County area), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
76 "PLACES Data."
77 "COMPASS HHS Home."
78 This touches on concepts discussed in the Misalignment of U.S. Administrative Definitions to Lived Experiences section of this report.

for an in-person meeting. The online application may theoretically be more accessible to those without case managers, but the reality is that the application is adequately challenging to navigate for non-experts that it doesn't make much of a difference.

Compliance, learning, and psychological costs, according to the framework of Administrative Burdens[79], essentially incentivize people to either give up on applying because they don't have the capacity to meet the challenge or to focus their efforts on becoming skilled at applying and to avoid acting in any way that doesn't align neatly with the administrative definitions and categories of the applications. Roughly, applicants are bifurcated into two groups: 1) "the working poor", who often don't succeed at following the application process through to completion due to the the barriers they face along the way (and thus their needs go unmet), and 2) those who have recognized that the significant effort and expertise required to navigate this bureaucracy is a skillset they can wield to gain the assistance they need, if they tailor their lives to continue qualifying. The limited accessibility of COMPASS is a state-level problem, but part of the wider challenge is national; anti-poverty efforts will be hampered nation-wide for as long as there remains a gap between the income at which people qualify for public assistance and the income at which they are self-sustaining and no longer have need of assistance.

Deaths of Despair

In addition to the challenges involved in accessing acute or specialist care and gaining and maintaining health insurance, Bedford County residents face a host of chronic health challenges. Deaths of despair were originally identified in 2015 by Anne Case and Angus Deaton in their research on capitalism and human welfare. Suicides, drug overdoses and alcohol poisonings are the most direct and obvious causes of death considered to fall into the category of deaths of despair. The Pennsylvania Department of Health tracks data about reported suicides and reports them as a rate per 1,000 deaths; the state-wide average rate is 14.5 and that of Bedford County is 21.8.[80]

Deaths of despair, however, encompass many more complicated, ongoing health problems as well. Pervasive feelings of hopelessness contribute to chronic problems such as obesity, COPD and heart disease, by way of poor eating, smoking, and exercise habits and being less proactive in seeking medical care and complying with medical advice. One Bedford County primary care physician characterized the health struggles of her patients as aligning with these chronic conditions, saying "Most of my patients are seen for hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease, COPD, and even depression and anxiety. I think it's possible that just about all my patients carry at least one of those diagnoses." Deaths-of-despair-related survey data from 2019 comparing measures recorded from Bedford County and the U.S. overall are organized and displayed in Figure 10 below, and Bedford County compares unfavorably to national averages.

79 Herd and Moynihan, "Understanding Administrative Burden," in Administrative Burden: Policymaking by Other Means.
80 "CCA 2022 Community Needs Assessment," 53.

Figure 10: Survey Data Related to Deaths of Despair

Measure	Short Question Text	Rates in Bedford County (age-adjusted)	Median Rates of all U.S. States and D.C. (crude prevalence)
Binge drinking among adults aged >=18 years	Binge Drinking	19.8%	16.8%
Chronic kidney disease among adults aged >=18 years	Chronic Kidney Disease	2.7%	2.9%
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease among adults aged >=18 years	COPD	7.8%	6.5%
Coronary heart disease among adults aged >=18 years	Coronary Heart Disease	6%	3.9%
Current smoking among adults aged >=18 years	Current Smoking	23.9%	16%
Depression among adults aged >=18 years	Depression	23.1%	19.9%
Diagnosed diabetes among adults aged >=18 years	Diabetes	9.1%	10.7%
Fair or poor self-rated health status among adults aged >=18 years	General Health	20.1%	18%
Current lack of health insurance among adults aged 18-64 years	Health Insurance	12.6%	11%
High blood pressure among adults aged >=18 years	High Blood Pressure	30.1%	32.3%
High cholesterol among adults aged >=18 years who have been screened in the past 5 years	High Cholesterol	28.5%	33.1%
Mental health not good for >=14 days among adults aged >=18 years	Mental Health	17.2%	13.8%
Obesity among adults aged >=18 years	Obesity	34.1%	32.1%
Physical health not good for >=14 days among adults aged >=18 years	Physical Health	14.1%	12.6%

A table depicting survey data related to deaths of despair, comparing Bedford County to the U.S. overall.

Mental Health Challenges

Inadequate provision of mental health services in Bedford County exacerbates the current situation of residents' unmet needs. One Bedford County social worker noted, "We have a lot of poverty-related mental health challenges in this area, especially trauma-related challenges. There's just so much multi-generational trauma that hasn't been disrupted or addressed, and our institutions aren't up to the task of doing much else than cushioning some of the worst of it." CDC Survey data for the area show that 17.2% of adults report their mental health to have been "not good" for at least two weeks preceding being polled, and 23.1% of them report depression.[81] One local doctor remarked, "Many of my clients come in for treatment related to depression, which would be better handled by mental healthcare providers; but this area doesn't have enough qualified counselors or therapists to offer them the care they need."[82] Without adequate professional mental health services, many Bedford County residents rely on other means for managing symptoms of mental health distress, including use/abuse of substances.

Substance Abuse

Though not unique to Bedford County, substance abuse is present in the county as a poverty-related challenge. Data from Personal Solutions, Inc. (PSI), Bedford County's primary substance abuse counseling center, show high rates of use of accessible low-cost substances such as alcohol, heroin, marijuana and meth, and low rates of more expensive drugs like cocaine and benzodiazepines.[83] The majority of PSI clients were referred to their services by their probation and parole officers; however, many work with PSI voluntarily rather than being compelled by any legal requirements.[84] Data regarding drug of choice, referral source and age are shown below in Figure 11.

In small, socially-interwoven communities such as Bedford County, local attitudes about drug use and addiction can create a culture of stigmatization, which decreases the likelihood that individuals experiencing substance abuse disorders seek out professional services. As one drug and alcohol counselor at Personal Solutions, Inc., reports:

> "There is intense stigma against drugs and addiction in this area. Even those who are addicted to different substances disavow each other as contemptible as a way to avoid facing the cognitive dissonance. The narrative is that you are either hard working and strong and righteous or the opposite—lazy and weak and a liar; there's no room for reality, which is more nuanced. It leads to a lot of avoidance of services like ours [drug and alcohol counseling], because people try to hide it as much as possible instead of being proactive about it."[85]

Furthermore, in an environment of inadequate access to mental health services, Bedford County residents experiencing substance use disorder are less likely to receive professional help and therefore

81 "PLACES Data."
82 This ties into concepts from the Brain Drain section of this report.
83 PSI, "Monthly Details Report 2020-2021."
84 PSI, "Monthly Details Report 2020-2021."
85 (Drug and alcohol counselor at PSI), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.

may initiate substance use. This situation creates a positive feedback loop wherein inadequate mental health services fail to address residents' needs around substance abuse, which may in turn escalate their reliance upon substances.

Figure 11: Data Relating to PSI's 309 Clients

Drug of Choice		Referral Source		Age Ranges	
Alcohol	101 (33%)	Probation/ Parole	216 (70%)	Under 15	1 (0%)
Marijuana	45 (15%)	Self	62 (20%)	15-17	6 (2%)
Heroin	52 (17%)	Family/Friend	2 (1%)	18-24	48 (16%)
Other Opiates	28 (9%)	Drug and Alcohol Counselor	2 (1%)	25-34	120 (39%)
Amphetamines	56 (18%)	Employer	1 (0%)	35-44	63 (20%)
Synthetics	4 (1%)	CYS	18 (6%)	45-54	42 (14%)
Cocaine/Crack	9 (3%)	Hospital	4 (1%)	Over 54	29 (9%)
Benzos	8 (3%)	SAP	0 (0%)		
Suboxone	6 (2%)	Mental Health	4 (1%)		

Source: PSI Monthly Details Report 2020-2021

Conclusion

Bedford County faces many layers of poverty-related challenges, many of which have to do with national and state problems and policies that are difficult to affect via local efforts. The knots of some of Bedford County's challenges are so convoluted and interconnected as to earn qualification as "wicked problems,"[86] but that doesn't relieve us from the responsibility of attempting to address them.

People fall through the cracks of society more commonly and more easily than I believe is widely understood. By seeking a holistic rather than narrow understanding, we can begin the process of closing the gaps in society's safety net.

In this report, the organization and description of what I perceive to be the most significant poverty-related challenges facing the area, I sought to build an informative and useful document that honors both the lived experiences of Bedford County residents and the knowledge of public policy researchers.

86 "What's a Wicked Problem?"

Appendix A–

Anti-poverty Backbone Organizations in Bedford County

In the course of working to address poverty-related challenges, it is valuable to know what the backbone organizations[87] are in an area. Though Bedford County's poverty-related challenges are significant in prevalence and severity, there are already many people working to improve the socioeconomic outlook for residents. While this list is by no means exhaustive, anyone seeking to aid the poverty amelioration endeavors already going on in Bedford County, or to found a new initiative or organization to join forces with others already in place, would be well served by communicating or partnering with the professionals working in any of the following organizations.

Bedford-Somerset Developmental and Behavioral Health Services (DBHS) is the county agency that coordinates the majority of mental and behavioral healthcare and human services in Bedford County. They provide blended case management for individuals whose care involves multiple programs and/or agencies, handle waiver programs for individuals with disabilities, are responsible for mental health crisis intake and response, and even provide direct mental and behavioral healthcare services. In addition to all that, they are the primary provider of free behavioral-health-related trainings to other Bedford County service providers and public entities, and they do significant outreach and public awareness work.

Center for Community Action (CCA) is an anti-poverty organization in Bedford County that runs 29 different programs in the county, some in partnership with county government. These programs serve to connect residents with many forms of assistance toward increased access to: housing, internet, transportation (via the Medical Assistance Transportation Program and CART, as well as a small program that subsidizes the purchase of private vehicles), food, job counseling, childcare, post-secondary education opportunities, and GED tutoring and testing in the Bedford County Correctional Facility. All in all, CCA provided 1,060 services to 204 individuals in Bedford County between January 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021.[88]

Public schools in Bedford County are some of the most powerful and far-reaching actors in the county, often serving as the center of community life in their areas. Appendix B of this report goes into detail about some examples of anti-poverty work being done in school districts.

The Bedford County Commissioners are the political leaders of the county. According to a recent annual report, they work "in collaboration with many departments, agencies, and other partners and [are] committed to: Providing for the safety and security of county citizens; Improving public health; Protecting the environment and quality of life; Supporting economic growth; Working to provide

87 "What Are Backbone Organizations?"
88 (Representative of CCA), "CCA Service Statistics," August 16, 2022.

recreational opportunities."[89] In making decisions about how to help the county thrive, they are by default involved in anti-poverty efforts.

The Federated Library System of Bedford County plays an important role as freely-accessible public spaces and information centers in communities, as well as being hosts of informational and cultural events. Recent public library events in Bedford County have included giving away books and school supplies to low-income children; hosting regular story times; hosting registration events for community organizations; hosting job fairs put on by PA CareerLink or local businesses and organizations; and hosting ongoing STEM, book club, and crafting events for both students and adults.[90]

Personal Solutions, Inc. (PSI) provides drug and alcohol addiction education, treatment and referral services out of their Bedford, PA office. They served 309 County residents in direct treatment between July 2020 and June 2021[91] (the most recent complete annual report that is available); they also provide educational outreach services involving evidence-based methods of substance abuse prevention.

Nulton Diagnostics directly provides behavioral healthcare, and partners with some Bedford County public schools and a local substance abuse treatment program to provide direct services to those communities. They also provide partial hospitalization services to children and youth who are unable to attend school due to mental and behavioral health challenges and blended case management to individuals utilizing Medicaid. Overall, they serve 1175 people via their Bedford County office.[92]

PA CareerLink is a state agency that has both an online presence and a physical office in Bedford County. They offer information about available jobs and apprenticeship opportunities, application assistance, and some employment training.

The Bedford County Campus of Allegany College of Maryland is the local branch of an affordable two-year college that offers both academic and workforce development classes. While one can earn an associate's degree or certification, "[m]any other students utilize the Bedford County Campus as an educational stepping stone to earn college credits that transfer to other institutions of higher learning for the pursuit of Bachelor's Degrees."[93]

Your Safe Haven, Inc. is a domestic violence shelter and victim advocacy center in Bedford County. They assist "victims of domestic violence and sexual assault by providing counseling, helping to file a Protection From Abuse Order (PFA) and providing accompaniment through the court system."[94] They also provide service referrals, some legal assistance and community education.

89 Lang, Dallara, and Baughman, "2019 Annual Report," 8.
90 Lang, Dallara, and Baughman, "2019 Annual Report," 31.
91 PSI, "Monthly Details Report 2020-2021."
92 (Bedford County social worker), Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
93 Lang, Dallara, and Baughman, "2019 Annual Report," 32.
94 "Your Safe Haven."

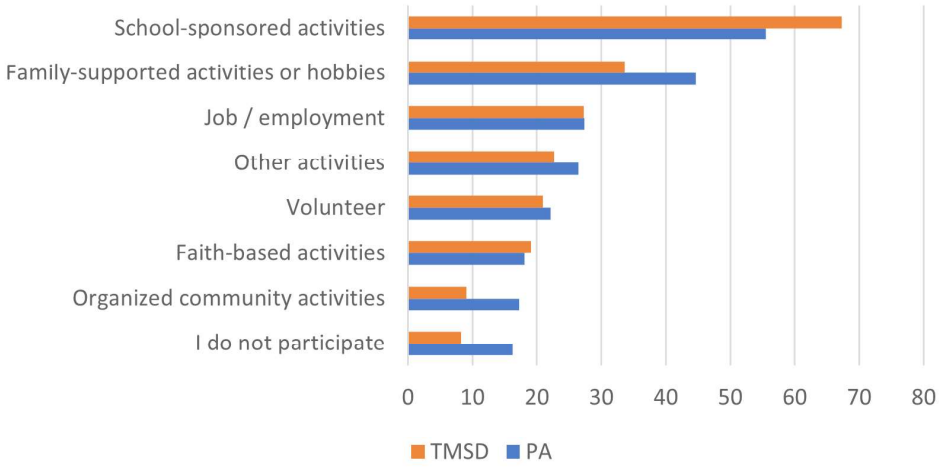
Appendix B –

A Case Study of Tussey Mountain School District

A population's ills are often concentrated in its least empowered people, who have less agency, cognitive capacity, and/or contextual knowledge to comprehend and cope with their struggles. Children are one such class of individuals. In the U.S., due to a weak social safety net[95], primary and secondary schools are forced to work double duty to both fulfill their intended educational role and to do the work necessary to help meet students' material needs so that they may be prepared to participate in education.[96] School employees, however, have not been trained, equipped, or empowered to work as social workers or institute social work programming.

In Bedford County, Pennsylvania, schools play an especially large role in civic life, as they are the most common conduit for organized community activities (see Figure 12). Public K-12 institutions are one of the most significant manifestations of government in this rural region, meaning that the schools are perhaps the largest access points for enacting government interventions. After exiting secondary school, for example, people are unlikely to come into contact with any other institutions with the capacity to recognize and address learning disabilities or behavioral health challenges, unless a problem is so significant that it leads to their involvement with the legal system. However, in those cases they face responses that are almost always punitive, rather than restorative or constructive.

Figure 12: Rates of Participation in Activities



A clustered bar graph comparing participation rates in different types of activities between TMSD and PA state data. Source: TMSD 2021 PAYS Report

95 "Investing In The Social Safety Net."
96 Kurt, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Education."

At least one school district in Bedford County, Tussey Mountain School District (TMSD), has recognized the power of their position and has been working to lift up their community. District administrators were spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic to accelerate long-term efforts related to community health. When speaking about the significant degradation of wellbeing of their school district's population during the pandemic, one school administrator said, "COVID, especially, forced us to realize that there are significant gaps in services in this [geographic] area, and that schools have been serving as first responders."[97] In 2021, the district applied for and was granted funding to hire a social worker to develop tailored interventions and provide wrap[98] support to students and families. The hope was that a competent professional in this role could bridge the gaps in services for community members and effect a healthier, more resilient student population.[99]

Employees at TMSD have collaborated to identify students' challenges through direct observation as well as by making use of TMSD-specific data from various surveys and reports. Notable among such resources are: the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS)[100], which is regularly administered to all 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students; and the PA Future Ready Index, which is a collection of school progress measures gathered and reported by the state. The most recent Future Ready Index data reports that 63.1% of students in Tussey Mountain School District are classified as "Economically Disadvantaged" and 17.3% are classified as "Special Education."[101] Administrators at TMSD paid special attention to the areas in which PAYS data differed notably between local and state levels, indicating problems that are more local and therefore potentially more susceptible to local interventions. Figure 13, below, summarizes the largest discrepancies.[102]

Figure 13: Pennsylvania Youth Survey Data

		TMSD	PA
Substance Use	Report using alcohol	19.5%	13.4%
	Report using tobacco products*	13.9%	5.6%
	Report using marijuana	8.0%	7.0%
Risky Behaviors	Report binge drinking	10.6%	5.0%
	Report drinking and driving	12.3%	5.9%
Gambling	Report having gambled*	16.7%	13.4%
	Report lying to gamble more, and feeling that there were times they couldn't stop*	3.5%	2.0%
Mental Health	Report being depressed for past year	50.3%	40.1%
	Attest to low self worth	42.1%	38.6%
Exposure	Observe substance use in adults in their lives*	46.6%	35.7%
Norms	Disapprove of substance use for people their age*	70.9%	80.0%

A table comparing TMSD and Pennsylvania state-wide PAYS data. Source: TMSD 2021 PAYS Report

97 Diehl, Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
98 Wrap or wraparound services are those that consider problems comprehensively rather than narrowly. Context and interaction effects are taken into account when planning support.
99 Neville, Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
100 Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, and Pennsylvania Department of Education, "TMSD 2021 PAYS Report."
101 "District Fast Facts - Tussey Mountain SD - Future Ready PA Index."
102 I compiled this table using data from the 2021-2022 Tussey Mountain School District PAYS report. Some of the categories, such as "Tobacco products" report an average of the data regarding a variety of subtopics, such as cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, etc. Those amalgamated categories are marked with an asterisk.

Underlying all of these problems is a sometimes-difficult relationship between TMSD staff and parents of the students. This relationship is most frequently strained by a differing perception of school's role in society between the faculty and parents. As mentioned above and depicted in Figure 12, Tussey Mountain schools are the primary source of pro-social activities in their district's community. Many in the area have grown to respect the school's social role above its educational role (as mentioned in a footnote when discussing childcare in the Employment section of this report). Parents, whose capacities are often already over-taxed in their own lives, often balk at any perceived burden from schools when students are sent home with homework or administrative documents. Teachers, whose capacities are also often over-taxed, balk at having to deal with behavioral problems and academic underachievement from students who don't value the educational aspects of school. The phenomenon of brain drain may play a role in these tensions. Researchers writing in 2014 about brain drain in rural communities commented, "Perhaps not surprisingly, these processes often result in local ambivalence regarding the role and value of education since educational attainment is so closely linked to youth outmigration."[103]

TMSD's recent development of a team of people who are responsible for and competent at providing social services has helped teachers to be able to step back from their roles as counselors and crisis managers and step more fully into their roles as educators. A social worker and full-time psychologist now work in collaboration with administrators and outside agencies to help families face their challenges and develop increased capacity to do more than just survive.

One example of how schools in Bedford County play an outsized social role is in reaction to house fires. Three families in the Tussey Mountain School District lost their homes to fire in the 2021-2022 school year.[104] (As discussed in the Housing section of this report, this is a fairly frequent occurrence in Bedford County.) Traditionally in TMSD, families who have lost their homes to house fires have "doubled up" by moving in with other family members, community fundraisers have been held, and children in affected households have suffered significant disruptions in their schooling. With the recent addition of a social worker, Mrs. Neville, to the TMSD staff, the district has significantly increased its ability to help families by facilitating their connection with outside resources and providing ongoing support as families adjust and cope with trauma.

TMSD has also recently adopted other strategies to address the challenges they are facing. For one, the social worker has "worked with CYS, Youth Truancy Workers, and [TMSD] administration to improve policies and procedures"[105] regarding truancy. Recognizing that chronic attendance issues may be rooted in barriers faced by families, Mrs. Neville "created a safe space to help students and families address attendance barriers."[106] Working with all relevant parties, the social worker has developed strategies to re-engage students with school after periods of truancy. Her continuous support has yielded positive results: "At the middle/high school level, 47 of 50 chronically truant students were re-engaged [in the 2021-2022 school year] after working with Mrs. Neville."[107]

103 Petrin, Schafft, and Meece, "Educational Sorting and Residential Aspirations Among Rural High School Students."
104 Diehl, "Director of Education's Summer Administrative Report."
105 Diehl, "Director of Education's Summer Administrative Report."
106 Diehl, "Director of Education's Summer Administrative Report."
107 Diehl, "Director of Education's Summer Administrative Report."

A related problem at TMSD has historically been that a significant number of students in their final years of high school will disengage from school after turning 18, especially upon realizing they'd need to expend more time and effort than they had anticipated in order to graduate. Very few students who find out that they'll need to repeat their senior year for a chance to qualify for a high school diploma are willing to go through with repeating the school year. TMSD's social worker worked last year to forge a middle ground for students in this position to do alternative work to earn their diplomas. In effort to prevent student attrition in later grades,[108] TMSD's social support team instituted a program called Graduation Station, where students who have been identified as being at risk of not qualifying for graduation when their time comes are matched with a mentor and asked to check in regularly during designated after-school periods. A plan is tailored for each student, wherein they are prescribed a set of steps on an attainable path toward graduation. Ten seniors were enrolled in the program in its pilot year, and nine of them followed through with the plans reached in compromise and earned their high school diplomas. Four of them graduated with their classmates at the standard commencement ceremony, and five attained belated qualification in the summer of 2022. Mrs. Neville organized a summer commencement ceremony, which, in the words of TMSD's director of education, "facilitated positive relationships [between the district and] these families and students, all of whom report planning to stay in this area."[109] The hope is that taking measures like this will yield long-term benefits in the form of improved relationships between TMSD and local families.[110]

TMSD's social worker has done much to engage students who are marginalized and often "fall through the cracks," such as those experiencing hospitalization, and those who live in the district and are eligible to participate in extracurricular activities but don't attend TMSD schools. Generally, she has proceeded with the understanding that students cannot succeed in school until their basic needs are met. Working from that premise, part of her efforts have gone to helping students with "home problems" get "home solutions." For example, one student at TMSD was acting as the primary caretaker for her disabled mother, leading to the student frequently missing school and not completing her homework. Mrs. Neville helped the student and her mother to apply for assistance in the form of a home health aide, and the application was accepted. Since the health aide began working in the household, the student has successfully re-engaged with her schooling and has not been chronically truant.[111]

The social worker has also prioritized addressing students' mental health challenges, with both systemic-level and individual-level interventions. On the larger scale, she and the rest of the social support team at TMSD have implemented[112] a program called Great Starts, where students who experience school anxiety can be guided each morning in evidence-based practices for coping with anxiety. Mrs. Neville has also connected TMSD with the local behavioral health agency Nulton Diagnostics, and now professionals from that agency provide counseling services that TMSD students have long needed. Eighteen students received regular outpatient therapy at school last year without

108 While the pilot program only involved 12th-graders, the version of this program rolling out in the 2022-2023 school year includes all 10th-, 11th- and 12th-graders who have been identified by teachers or staff as at risk of not qualifying for graduation by their relevant deadline.
109 Diehl, "Director of Education's Summer Administrative Report."
110 Diehl, Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
111 Neville, Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
112 The director of education, school psychologist and school social worker all recognized the need for a program like Great Starts and collaboratively designed it.

any cost or transportation burden to their families. The social worker also connected TMSD with PSI, a local company that provides drug and alcohol addiction education, treatment and referral services. PSI provided TMSD with NARCAN doses and relevant training, and a representative from PSI provides drug and alcohol screenings when TMSD has need of them. The relationships that have been established between TMSD and these two agencies are avenues for future communication and expert consultation. At the individual level, the social worker has worked to identify behavioral challenges and worked with each student, their family members, and relevant school faculty to tailor plans for how to move forward constructively. As Mrs. Neville herself puts it, "I think having been empowered to call multiple parties to the table and having the length of employment to provide continuous, ongoing support to students in the form of consistent follow-up meetings have been key to my success."

In total, in her first year of employment with Tussey Mountain School District the social worker logged 52 attendance meetings and 146 other student meetings. She went on 110 home visits, which served both to increase her understanding of the context of students' experiences and as a preferable site for meetings, as many families were less defensive and more receptive to ideas for interventions when they were on their own "turf".[113] The social worker also participated in 75 Circle of Support meetings, which are "a collaborative effort . . . to brainstorm solutions to various academic and social issues" with input from all relevant stakeholders, including representatives from outside agencies.

Now that the district is more able to act to address challenges, they've begun moving to actively screen for problems and to undertake initiatives intended to build preventative resilience in their students. K-4 students are screened rigorously for learning disabilities and next year the district will be initiating a program of having all 2nd-graders be screened for Gifted services. The school social worker is also acting to "work with [school] principals to begin to establish restorative and reflective discipline practices,"[114] in recognition of the preponderance of evidence that constructive solutions are more effective than punitive practices.[115,116,117] In effort to organize and grow the constructive, supportive, and pro-social offerings available in the after-school time slot known as 10th period, TMSD will be assigning students to one of multiple organized tutoring and skill-building "classes" in the coming year, including one specifically for students who need help in growing their study skills and executive functionality. Additionally, the district is working to stymie the flow of students with special emotional needs out of the district (often into juvenile detention centers, outpatient clinics, cyberschool programs, etc.) by instituting a specially-designated classroom in the middle/high school to accommodate them. This hybrid classroom will involve supervised online learning mixed with group therapy and mental health education designed to build and grow students' coping skills. Students will leave the hybrid classroom to attend select in-person classes in which they are most likely to thrive. Finally, Mrs. Neville is working with representatives from other local school districts and judges and public administrators who preside over local jurisdictions to clarify and standardize truancy policies across the area. The hope is that clearer and better regulated policies will lead to

113 Diehl, Interview with Maddi Brumbaugh.
114 Diehl, "Director of Education's Summer Administrative Report."
115 Skiba and Peterson, "School Discipline at a Crossroads."
116 Skiba and Losen, "From Reaction to Prevention: Turning the Page on School Discipline."
117 Jean-Pierre and Parris, "Alternative School Discipline Principles and Interventions: An Overview of the Literature."

earlier identification of truancy, which will in turn lead to earlier interventions for the underlying causes and prevent more harm.

Overall, having a dedicated school social worker has been a "game changer", according to the director of education at TMSD, Denelle Diehl. In a recent meeting with the school board, the director reported:

> "Mrs. Neville's ability to act as an effective liaison between the school, home, and community is a component to student success that has been missing for quite some time. The school social worker position enables us to integrate services and meet needs which have a direct impact on a student's ability to succeed academically, socially, and behaviorally while at school."

Before bringing the social worker on board, school staff and faculty were commonly in a position where they could identify students' challenges and even identify potentially-beneficial interventions for addressing them but didn't have the means to enact any changes. Crucially, Mrs. Neville has garnered trust and buy-in from all relevant stakeholders, and has been empowered to broker compromises. She has worked effectively to connect students with resources outside the school to holistically improve their wellbeing. As Mrs. Diehl stated in her recent report, "While coordinating resources, in many cases, our school social worker has connected families to a more appropriate service and saved the district from absorbing a local cost."[118] Not only has much of the burden of direct mental and behavioral health support been routed to more appropriate providers, but Tussey Mountain School District now seems well positioned to positively affect many of the poverty-related challenges facing their community.

118 Diehl, "Director of Education's Summer Administrative Report."

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