**Battling Declining Enrollment: Rural Schools in a Competitive Society**

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* While providing a snapshot of local educational policies intended to ameliorate the financial constraints of a rural Wisconsin school district, this research suggests that neoliberal educational policies are shifting the orientation of school staff to schools, schools to communities, and residents to their local schools. This study contends that the school district administration is prioritizing their need for future financial stability through the expansion of local schooling options and recalculating staff compensation.
* The Forest Lake school district is mired in a paradoxical situation in which being competitive in the educational marketplace equates to disrupting established school-community relations. The findings imply that required participation in an educational marketplace shifts the priorities of a rural school district to a focus on competition and financial security over the well-being of the school community.
* Due to state funding policies and new governance liberties (and demands), the school district of Forest Lake must prioritize their future funding needs. This prioritization disrupts the basis upon which the school-community relationship exists and reshapes it through a focus on image management, incentive structures, and establishing community buy-in. As the research findings illustrate, this comes with some costs, especially as institutional survival replaces relational trust.