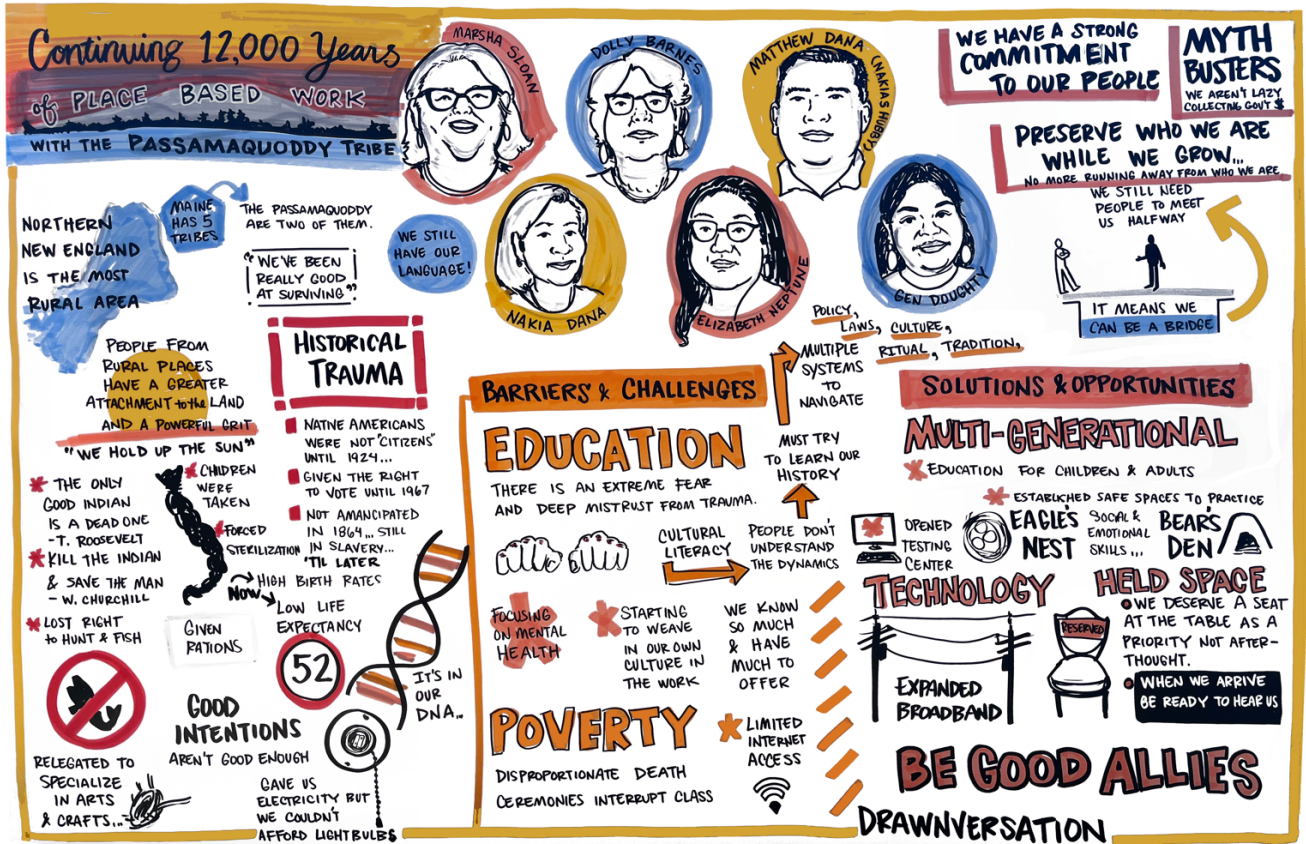


NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND RURAL SUMMIT

SEPTEMBER 10-11, 2024



KEY IDEAS

Families and Schools Working Together

- The New Hampshire Statewide Family Engagement Center helps schools and families team up to support children.
- Family Villages and the New Hampshire Network of Partnership Schools are entry points for families and teachers who want to be more engaged.

Action: Join the [Advisory Council](#) to connect with other families and schools.

The Role of Community Schools

- Community Schools are public schools that provide unique services tailored to their community.
- Family engagement is at the core of the community school approach, and community schools aim to treat parents as experts who know what students and communities need to be successful.

Action: Connect with [Manchester Proud](#) to learn more about full-service community schools in New Hampshire.

Helping Families with Grief

- 1 in 9 low-income children in New Hampshire will lose a parent or sibling before the age of 18, with the number of deaths due to drug overdose or suicide increasing in recent years.
- Peer-to-peer support groups exist to serve New Hampshire families who experience losses.

Action: Be willing to listen to children talk about their emotions and experiences.

Action: Connect with [NH Friends of Aine](#) for services.

Parents in Decision-Making

- Parent and youth voices are often missing from policy discussions and decisions.
- The New Hampshire House Education Committee has found some success in elevating student and family voice in public hearings.

Action: School leaders should invite families to serve on school committees.

Action: School boards should consider ways to make their meetings more accessible to working families.



Message of Hope

- The biggest result of the conference was time for teachers, families, librarians and professionals from across NH to connect on the issue they care most about: the success of New Hampshire children.

Action: Connect with families and educators across the state by joining the NH-SFEC Advisory Council

Action: Join us in July 2025 for the second Northern New England Rural Summit.

New Hampshire Communities & The Northern New England Rural Summit

New England states including New Hampshire are often overlooked in conversations about rural in part due to the perceived density of the northeast resulting from a concentration of major cities. But outside of these metropolitan areas lie the rolling green hills, beautiful lakes and coastlines of rural New England. Approximately 47% of the population of New Hampshire live in rural areas, and 84% of New Hampshire is considered rural.

Participants in the convening also shared that they felt New England is unique, and that rural people in New Hampshire have even stronger community bonds and stronger relationships to the land.

On September 10 and 11, 2024, Partners for Rural Impact convened approximately 100 people in Whitefield, New Hampshire, for the Northern New England Rural Summit. At the Summit teachers, leaders, community members, and families came together to talk about family engagement strategies, place-based approaches and two generation strategies for ensuring family thriving. One teacher attending the convening shared how valuable it was for her work, "As teachers we are siloed, we spend so much time alone in our classrooms. Being able to collaborate and learn what others are doing. I learned this week about two other organizations that I had no idea existed that are only 40 minutes from me, which is close in our terms. I look forward to collaborating with people that have a different perspective." The convening provided an opportunity for people from across the state to strengthen existing relationships and build new relationships with others in and outside of their communities. While the meeting was mostly focused on the incredible assets in New Hampshire and the deep work being done around family engagement, many sessions also shared information about the heavy grief held by many students and families in New Hampshire.

The overarching message that shone through the convening was that there is much to be hopeful about in the future. There are so many people in New Hampshire already working together who are focused on asset-based approaches, and who celebrate and build on the strengths of their rural communities. At the same time the convening provided participants with a sort of double vision, acknowledging the assets and great work being done while also acknowledging the heavy trauma and challenges of the past and those that continue in New Hampshire communities today. One theme that emerged during the convening was around grief and how to support grieving families to help them thrive.

Session Deep Dive

Handling Grief

Linda Dinndorf and Kristen Cushman conducted a Grief Education Training where they dispelled some common myths about grief. Grief education is important in New Hampshire, where 1 in 12 children will lose a parent or sibling before the age of 18. While this number is similar to much of the United States, in low-income households in New Hampshire, children are 71% more likely to experience a parent or sibling death, meaning 1 in 9 children will lose a parent or sibling before the age of 18, and low-income households in New Hampshire are much more concentrated in rural communities. The number of deaths from suicide and drug overdose have both increased in New Hampshire in recent years, and 33% of children who attend peer to peer grief support groups are attending because they have lost a friend or family member to a drug overdose or suicide, and often they have witnessed these events firsthand.

Given these striking statistics, it is important that schools and communities are equipped with strategies to help families process grief.

- **Strategy 1** – provide a trusted adult with whom the young person can discuss their emotions. This strategy often works best when the adult is not a family member.
- **Strategy 2** – hold community gatherings so families can recognize and remember those who have been lost, which supports healthy grieving.
- **Strategy 3** – Always use clear language about death.



Session Deep Dive Community Schools

Family Engagement and Community Schools

“Strong family and community engagement is foundational to community schools; community schools are a way to operationalize this engagement.”

-Joline Collins, Northeast Regional Director, Institute for Educational Leadership

As hubs for integrated student and family services, community schools create intentional, inclusive partnerships between educators, families, and community organizations. Community schools often lead the way in recognizing that families bring valuable knowledge and perspectives to the educational process. Community schools are public schools that provide unique services and supports tailored to the needs of the community. This may mean that a community school offers before or after school programming, health and wellness supports including food banks, and an entire range of other opportunities based.

Whether it be within or outside the context of community schools, strategies and lessons emerged during the convening around how to grow and build resilient rural communities.

Session Deep Dive: Policy Development

The heart of New Hampshire is community, and a community-centered approach to policy empowers families and legislators to overcome many barriers to education. In a discussion of these barriers led by Aaron Dupuis (Campus Compact for New Hampshire) and Jenna Meglen (Partners for Rural Impact), participants noted two primary challenges: (1) a lack of family engagement in the classroom and (2) the need to better communicate parent needs to policy makers. Several strategies for addressing the issues were considered, including inviting parents to school board meetings to share concerns, engaging parents and uplifting their voices were noted as highly effective strategies. Participants shared that elevating student and parent voices in front of the New Hampshire House Education Committee’s public hearings was one successful strategy for improving education in the

state. Formed by educators and commissioned by the state house, the New Hampshire House Education Committee is tasked with formally identifying issues relating to the regulation of school districts and schools as well as postsecondary education and creating solutions through legislative action. The committee is bipartisan, with ten Democratic members and ten Republican members, allowing the Committee to present proposed legislation to the Governor's office in a method that limits the impact of partisan politics. The Committee's public hearings also allow the Committee to understand community voice and allow the public to hold legislators accountable. While the work ahead to improve education in New Hampshire might at times feel daunting, the Committee represents an opportunity for community engagement, partnership between policy makers and the public, and a concrete way to move New Hampshire's education system forward.