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ABSTRACT

Defined as a concept which centers on planning educational needs at the local level, accountability is particularly feasible in small rural schools, since the number of people responsible for education needs is more readily manageable than the number found in urban areas. Designed to familiarize rural parents and other lay citizens with the concept and practice of accountability, this handbook defines the shared responsibilities of schools, legislators, school boards, school administrators, teachers, parents, community, and students. Primary responsibilities are defined as follows: Rural schools are accountable for keeping pace with the rapidly changing trends of rural life, preparing students for jobs within the community, for continuing education, or for urban transition. Legislators are accountable for state laws that provide funds for equal education. School boards are accountable for keeping up with information relative to the spending of school funds and for maintaining communication channels. Administrators are accountable to the school board for district management and information dissemination. Teachers are accountable for knowing and presenting subject matter via suitable methods. Parents are accountable for the learning habits and attitudes of their children. Communities are accountable for educational involvement. Students are accountable for learning. (JC)

RURAL EDUCATION--PARTNERS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Legislators
School Boards
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PREFACE

Increasingly recognition is being given to the need for educational accountability, a concept which includes persons or agencies involved in and/or responsible for public school education. Since the size of the rural area affords a distinct advantage in the determination of educational accountability, because the number of people responsible for the education of rural children is more readily manageable, this document, published primarily for the lay citizen, defines the respective responsibilities of government, community, school, parent, and student. It is the purpose of this document, then, to promote the positive aspects of educational accountability, a concept often feared by the professional educator, in an effort to create awareness on the part of rural citizens, thereby aiding them in the implementation of constructive educational accountability. Given the importance of attitudes inherent in any consideration of educational accountability, we wish to express our gratitude to the National Cowbelles Association for manuscript critique and rural American attitude assessment.

Everett Edington
Director, ERIC/CRESS

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INTRODUCTION

The watchword in education today is accountability. It really means "responsibility" for meeting the educational needs of children -- a responsibility shared by public schools and their communities.

The accountability movement began in the late 1960's, when taxpayers rebelled against the rising costs of education, and has been spreading nationwide. More than half the states have accountability laws; others are considering legislation or have committees studying accountability systems for future action.

Taxpayers wanted to know what kind of education their money is buying. Accountability gives them public reports and a voice in planning what schools teach. Schools tell citizens how children are learning and how much it costs. Local communities help their schools plan and evaluate instructional programs.

Accountability holds a promise to improve the quality of education in rural schools. It offers a challenge to parents, citizens, and educators to work together to revise programs and develop curriculums that will increase the learning opportunities for rural children.

Rural schools are accountable for providing their students with the knowledge and tools for earning their livings in an increasingly-technological society. The accountability is shared by legislators, school boards, administrators, teachers, parents, communities, and students.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

Americans have always believed that education is a path to a better society and that the nation's public schools are the responsibility of its citizens. Schools have always been accountable to society for their successes and failures in educating children. So, the concept of ac-acountability is not new but inherent in the philosophy of public education.

The movement for educational accountability in the 1960's grew out of the general social unrest of the period, the population explosion, and increased expenses to build and support schools. Public complaints about the cost and quality of education led to new laws and development of business-like systems of accountability that involve community-school cooperation.

The schools provide public reports about student achievement and the costs of learning. The community participates in determing educational goals for its schools, planning ways and means to accomplish the objectives, and evaluating the success or failure of programs on a cost-learning ratio.

Accountability procedures vary some from state to state but they all center on planning educational needs at the local level. Rural communities have generally resisted centralization and held onto local control of their schools. This is an asset in accountability planning.

Here's how an accountability system usually works: A committee of parents and other adults, students, teachers, and administrators determines the goals and programs most important to the local school and community. The committee considers available resources and how they can be applied toward the desired goals and later evaluates the results. In some systems, an outside or professional consultant makes the final evaluation.

The purpose of accountability, of course, is to increase learning opportunities for all children. Gains in student learning are measured on before-and-after tests. The relation between student achievement and the cost of a program is a basis for evaluating its effectiveness in fulfilling its objective. This evaluation is a guide to the next year's planning.

Regular evaluation of instructional programs has been stimulating new approaches, experimentation, and innovations in courses and teaching skills in many schools. The involvement of citizens on accountability planning committees can promote exchange of ideas and mutual understanding between school and community. Parents have become more active in encouraging schools to try new methods and courses and to develop learning opportunities for children with special needs.

Rural schools, many of which have been lagging behind national trends and changes in education, can benefit from the regular assessment of programs to determine how they can improve curriculums to offer more and better learning opportunities.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE RURAL SCHOOL

Rural schools are responsible for educating rural children to live and make their livings in an ever-changing and widening world society. The traditional pattern of rustic life on self-supporting family farms has been disappearing. School dropouts and failures can no longer get lost in milking cows or stacking hay on the ancestral homestead.

Agriculture has become an efficient industry that demands scientific know-how, skilled technical services, and more machines and less human labor. Timber and mining are largely-mechanized rural industries and tourism and outdoor recreation enterprises require varied skills in management and communications.

Rural schools are accountable for keeping pace with the changing trends in rural life. The products of industry, modern utilities, and fast transportation have provided conveniences and means of inter-communication that have narrowed the gap between rural and urban living. Retired people and families with young children, weary of the congestion and pollution of large cities, have been moving into the country in greater numbers. They bring different, sometimes alien, influences to be integrated with the established manners and customs of rural communities.

Rural families are becoming more sophisticated and more rural parents are encouraging their children to continue education beyond high school. In some rural communities, a large percentage of high school graduates go on to college or

technical schools. But in rural areas where parents do not appreciate the value of education the percentage is smaller.

Three-fourths of the males in rural communities work in occupations other than farming. But rural industries and the businesses that support them have too few jobs to accommodate the number of children that rural schools educate. Although vocational education programs are on the increase in rural schools, some rural youths who move to the cities for jobs lack the training or experience to obtain and hold employment.

This means that rural schools can be held accountable for offering educational programs that prepare some students for jobs in the community, some for continuing education in colleges or vocational schools, and others for the transition to working and living in a city. Schools can help to encourage community development to attract new business and industry to rural areas to provide more vocational experience fo. rural students.

A successful farmer finds out what he needs to do to make a good crop. He tries new fertilizers, different seed, or improved methods of cultivation. A good rural school likewise must be ready to try new ideas to improve its services and programs. Accountability means flexibility, readiness to change to meet constantly-changing conditions in the rural community and in the general society.

Rural schools are unique because they serve limited populations with common or similar interests. They tend to mirror the appreciation and understanding of the value of education in their communities. More than one-third of all

Americans live in rural areas and they have more children per family than city dwellers. But some schools that serve rural children fall below the national average on federal standards. Why?

The per-pupil cost of education in rural schools is higher than the national average because small schools are expensive to maintain. Even though rural communities generally contribute a greater proportion of their finances for schools than their city cousins, the funds are not adequate to support the broad general and vocational education programs and services of large consolidated rural or city schools.

Agricultural land is valuable and rural citizens in some areas have traditionally opposed increasing property taxes for education. Some rural communities do not appreciate the value of education for personal enrichment or its economic importance for their children.

Since most rural schools have limited funds and community resources to supplement services and programs, they need to spend their money wisely to offer their children a quality education. They have some advantages over city schools. The teacher-pupil ratio in rural schools is usually lower and classes are smaller. This makes it easier to change programs and adjust them to the needs of individual students.

Smaller classes also permit closer teacher-student relationships in rural schools. Recent accountability studies showed that the fewer children a teacher is responsible for the faster the learning rate of students. Individual attention by teachers can stimulate learning and offset some of the

curriculum limitations of a small school. Shortage of resources can sometimes encourage teachers and students to find ways to satisfy specific educational interests.

Accountability can help to improve the quality of education in rural schools. Community-school cooperation in planning goals and evaluating the cost-learning relationship of programs can promote continuous awareness of the needs and interests of students and citizens. Programs can be adjusted to fit the changing needs of children in the local community.

Accountability invites rural parents and citizens to be leaders in improving educational opportunities for their children. Everyone concerned with the education of children is accountable in some part for the kind of school his community maintains.

LEGISLATORS MAKE THE LAWS

Legislators should be accountable for state laws that provide sufficient money for schools so that every child -- regardless of race, color, creed, economic status, or ability to learn -- has an equal opportunity for a formal education. But that is idealistic. Some states are too poor to support their schools adequately and some do not distribute their funds equally to all schools.

Generally, the state collects taxes for education as provided by its constitution and allocates funds to local school districts (counties in some states) and to the boards of schools of higher and special education. Federal grants may be given outright or on a matching basis and the state is responsible for proper use and distribution of the money.

The most common sources of finances for education are property and sales taxes. Wherever allocation of funds is based on local property tax collections, schools in districts of poor housing and low evaluation wind up with short budgets. They cannot afford to provide programs and services comparable to those of schools in districts of highly-assessed residential, business, or industrial property.

Court suits by citizens in 21 states and nationwide publicity by taxpayers associations about the unequal funding of schools are bringing reform of laws. Within the last few years, a number of states have revised educational financing laws and others are under public pressure for equal funding.

Some rural schools serve districts with high income from agriculture, mining, or timber; others serve poverty

districts of non-farm families with little or irregular income and low property valuation. Community involvement in accountability planning has helped to point up the contrasts. Federal grants have funded special projects for schools in some rural poverty districts and some states are making extra funds available to schools with inadequate budgets.

Legislators also make laws about curriculums and services, standards of certification for teachers and administrators, systems of tenure, merit, and retirement for professional staff members, and sometimes about instructional methods. The state department of education, headed by a state superintendent or commissioner, is accountable for carrying out education laws and outlining rules to be followed by local school districts.

Some education laws are out of date and interfere with changes to improve local schools. Many rural schools lack funds to increase services and learning opportunities. Pressure for reform is coming from professional associations of teachers and administrators. Citizens can help too. Rural school PTA chapters and farmers' organizations can be powerful pressure groups.

THE SCHOOL BOARD HOLDS THE PURSE

Rural schools come in all shapes and sizes -- from a little, renovated church on an Alaskan island to impressive, well-equipped buildings in new suburban subdivisions. Big or little, the rural school is the responsibility of the school board chosen by the voters of the local district.

Board members are the stewards of the funds and accountable to the community for keeping the physical plant running smoothly. They are responsible for carrying out the regulations of the state department of education, making policies and decisions, and providing the best-quality education the budget permits.

Board members are accountable for getting information from the district superintendent about new programs, costs, building upkeep, and specific needs of the school. To serve the best interests of the children of the district, they should keep in close touch with state administrators and legislators, other school districts, and community organizations and citizens. They must be progressive. The kind of school a board member attended is no longer totally adequate for the needs of his children.

Rural school board members are not just names on a ballot at election time. Voters usually know the candidates personally and can say with confidence, "Sam Smith is a good man for the job --he'll do right by our kids." It's not unusual for a rural citizen to discuss a problem with each

member of the board personally. Ideas are often shared informally -- perhaps in a roadside or grocery store chat or after a farm bureau or church meeting.

In small rural districts, where human relationships are close, the wishes and needs of the community may be made known to the board directly. But in larger communities or districts of widely-separated farm or ranch families, a consensus of interests may not be easy to determine. Board members can be accountable for using telephone or mail surveys or citizen advisory committees to collect information to guide their policies.

Since rural schools are often handicapped by limited funds and community resources, their board members need to keep posted about federal, state, and private-foundation grants for rural education. Through regular contacts with other school districts they may learn about new programs and sources of funds. Membership and active participation in school board organizations at county, state, and national levels can help to improve their accountability.

School board meetings are open to the public by law in some states, making the board members personally and directly accountable to citizens. In an era of inflation and taxpayer rebellion about the cost of education, the rural school board needs to show good management and open communication with the community. As elected officials, board members are accountable for carrying out their legal responsibility to the satisfaction of parents and citizens.

ADMINISTRATORS ARE MANAGERS

The top administrator in a district or county school system is the superintendent. He is selected by the school board for his executive or managerial ability to carry out the policies of the board and handle the budget. He is accountable to the board for his management of the district schools and also for channeling information to the board to guide its policies and decisions.

The axiom that good superintendents make good schools is especially true in rural districts. The superintendent is responsible for managing what is often the biggest single enterprise in a rural community. He needs to be a civic leader and take an active part in community affairs so that he can encourage educational programs that reflect the interests of students and citizens. He needs especially to know about civic and social problems that might affect the school or its students.

To be successful, a superintendent must know and understand his community. Efficient, well-trained administrators sometimes fail as rural school superintendents because their ideas do not meet the needs of the community and they move too fast to implement them. A rural school superintendent needs to establish his image as an authority on education but not to stand apart because of his authority. He needs to win the confidence of citizens and be accepted as a member of the community.

Since the superintendent and teachers are trained educators, rural communities often let them take over the leadership in school matters. If the superintendent is an experienced administrator, he usually knows how to use his leadership role to stimulate the community's interest and cooperation. Unfortunately, many rural schools cannot offer the facilities or salaries to attract progressive, experienced superintendents.

In the concept of accountability the superintendent is a key person in the school-community partnership. He is an important member of the committee of teachers, parents, students, and citizens who plan and evaluate the instructional programs and educational goals of the local school.

Through meetings with state administrators and other superintendents, the rural school superintendent can keep up with the latest trends in education. He is accountable for transmitting new ideas to the board and recommending changes to improve the quality of education in his district.

Within the district, the superintendent is accountable for supervising instructional programs, encouraging teachers to develop and use new skills, and protecting the rights of students. He is responsible for securing materials and resources and evaluating how well the school is meeting the needs, desires, and capacities of its students.

The superintendent is accountable for hiring teachers who meet the state standards and have the personal ability to adapt teaching methods to the needs of rural children and to gain acceptance by the community. He is responsible

also for the regular evaluation of teachers on whatever basis is required by state law.

The quality of education in a rural school depends greatly on the leadership of the superintendent in guiding his professional staff, working with the community, and promoting programs that meet the changing needs and interests of students. He needs to maintain good relations with the school board and to resist any Main Street pressures that threaten the best interests of the school and students or the success of its instructional programs.

RURAL SCHOOLS NEED GOOD TEACHERS

Doctors fail to cure all their patients and lawyers lose half their cases in court. Society accepts their failures. But teachers, the agents of education who have the most direct contact with children, have taken the brunt of the public's blame for school dropouts and failures.

Society expects teachers to have a perfect batting average. But they are bound to have some strikeouts. They cannot overcome all the social, economic, cultural, and physical handicaps that affect the learning of children.

Teachers cannot work "learning miracles." They can be held accountable for presenting knowledge, using all the skills they know, but children must do the learning. Parents, in particular, often forget their own and their children's accountability in the learning process. Take the father, for example, who complained to his son's teacher, "You've had Johnny for two years and he still sasses his mother"!

What are teachers in a rural school accountable for? They are responsible for knowing the subject matter and using teaching methods that suit the pupils, school, classroom, and circumstances. They are accountable to the school for carrying out the purposes of its programs and for maintaining discipline and a learning atmosphere in the classroom.

Rural school teachers need to know the makeup and attitudes of the community and the backgrounds of individual children. They must be able to accept and respect cultures, customs, and religions different from their own. They must

be able to accept the established ideals and principles of students and community and avoid imposing their personal beliefs or standards of behavior.

Teachers need to have a sensitive understanding of how children behave and an interest in their general welfare. Since teachers have children for most of the day for most of the year, their attitudes and guidance help to develop the behavior and personalities of their pupils. In fact, the influence of a teacher on the lives of children may be more lasting than what he or she teaches.

Attracting and holding well-qualified teachers are often problems in rural districts, especially in poor districts and in remote areas of low population. Rural teachers must be able to fit instruction to the experiences and interests of rural children and work with limited facilities and services. Few new teachers are willing to accept the challenge, even when the state has a uniform salary scale.

A successful rural teacher must be able to adjust to rural life and become an accepted member of the community. Those inspired with missionary zeal to work among Indians or low-income families, for instance, may be over-anxious and unrealistic and fail to win acceptance. Teachers who commute from a neighboring city or town often remain "outsiders" and do not become part of the community.

Training rural young people to return to rural communities as teachers is one of the current objectives of teacher-education programs in the colleges of several states with large rural populations. Qualified teachers are sorely

needed in rural schools with bilingual programs, where lack of communication between teacher and pupils can be a serious barrier to learning.

Teachers can be accountable for participating in educational organizations that help them keep up with programs and progressive trends in other areas. In-service teacher training meetings can keep them informed about the flow of new texts, materials, and methods. Students and the community also benefit from teachers' participation in such training sessions.

Accountability has focused on teachers as skilled professionals whose time should be spent in teaching. Teacher-aides (paraprofessionals) to free teachers from clerical and routine duties have helped many rural schools make better use of professional staffs. Qualified aides may assist teachers by giving individualized attention to handicapped and problem students and by interpreting language and customs in bilingual schools.

Accountability has stressed student achievement and encouraged teachers to develop teachniques to increase the rate of learning. One of the new approaches adaptable to rural schools is "internal performance contracting." A group of teachers (usually three or more) contracts with the school to accomplish a certain learning increase in return for a bonus pay raise.

The teachers may, for example, promise to raise the reading level of children in grades 5-6 by an extra year through special skills they think may speed up learning rates. If they succeed, they get the bonus; if not, they still have their jobs!

The abilities of teachers influence the quality of education in any school, but rural schools demand more than knowledge and good teaching methods. Rural teachers must be resourceful to cope with limited educational services, equipment, and community resources, and really like rural or small-town living.

Uniform salary schedules in some states have eliminated the financial difference between rural and urban jobs, giving teachers a freer choice. A recent California survey, showing that most rural teachers are contented and would not trade for city jobs, suggests that more teachers may be actively seeking employment in rural schools.

ACCOUNTABILITY ON THE HOME FRONT

The accountability of parents for the education of their children goes beyond paying taxes and getting them to school on time. Parents are accountable for the learning habits and attitudes that children bring to school. Parental opinions about the value of education; the moral, spiritual, cultural, and physical influences of the home; and inter-family relationships can stimulate or interfere with learning.

Society holds parents responsible for the proper feeding and clothing of their children so that they can attend school. Study after study has shown that malnourished and ill-clothed children have physical and emotional handicaps that hamper learning. Sleep in a crowded bed with too few blankets refreshes neither body nor mind. Discrimination -- be it religious, racial, or cultural -- works against learning.

Some children in rural schools in many parts of the nation are poorly nourished, live in unsanitary and unhealthy conditions, and have parents who see little value in education. Some children of migrant workers, farm laborers, and isolated Indian, Black, and Mexican-American families never get to school at all.

Poverty is not solely a problem of rural parents but they have done less to improve their situation than the more aggressive urban poor. Society has established agencies to help low-income families help themselves. Parents can be held accountable for using available resources to improve their own and their children's circumstances.

The services of home agents and aides (paraprofessionals) of the Extension Service, for example, are usually available in rural counties in every state. They are trained to help low-income rural families with budget-stretching ideas for good nutrition, clothing, home furnishing, and improving the home environment for children and parents. Since aides usually live in the area where they work, they are familiar with the language, customs, and resources.

Children are born without prejudice; discrimination is a learned attitude. Parents are accountable for teaching their children to understand and respect people of different races, cultures, and religious beliefs. A minority of Anglo-American children in a predominantly Mexican-American school may encounter as much discrimination as a minority of Blacks or Asian-Americans in a predominantly-Anglo school.

To insure equal opportunities for children with physical or learning handicaps, parents can be accountable for telling the school about their special needs and cooperating with teachers and administrators. Parents of children with language or cultural differences can be accountable for making the school and other students aware of specific educational needs.

Parents can be accountable to their children's school through activity in PTA or other adult organizations, serving on advisory committees, and taking advantage of "open-house" and cafeteria-visiting days. In many rural schools, parents promote and raise funds for activities of special interest to their children -- athletics, orchestra, band, foreign language

and dramatic societies, and 4-H, Future Farmers, and Future Homemakers clubs. Such efforts by parents can provide resources for travel and cultural enrichment experiences that the rural school budget does not permit.

If bright little Susie or Tommy suddenly begins bringing home C's instead of A's, a visit to the classroom may be enough to tell a parent why and how to help. Fathers and mothers are accountable for keeping in close touch with the school, knowing their children's teachers and what their children are being taught, and stimulating learning attitudes at home. Occasional classroom visits show parents' interest and usually please teachers. Some administrators encourage parental visits by outlining conference times and ways of approach for discussing Johnny's or Mary's problem.

Accountability can bring parents closer to the school. They have shown that they want to share in making decisions that affect the education of their children. Through committees, surveys, and personal contacts, parents in rural districts can be accountable for keeping the communication lines open both ways.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE CURRICULUM

By emphasizing student achievement and regular evaluation of instructional programs, accountability is leading to closer examination of costs and results and introducing changes in curriculums. To provide equal learning opportunities for their children, many rural schools need to re-design courses or expand curriculums.

When the value of a program depends on the cost-learning ratio, basic subjects like math, reading, and language are the easiest to measure by objective tests. Budget cuts, inflated prices, and higher payrolls to meet cost-of-living increases for personnel have led to cutbacks in music, drama, arts and crafts, and physical education in some schools.

Will accountability influence curriculum planning toward programs where students can demonstrate achievement? Some educators think this will be the trend of the future, and parents who think their children have been playing too much with arts and crafts like the greater emphasis on basic courses.

Perhaps you remember spelling bees, penmanship classes, gold stars on good papers, and a paddle by the teacher's desk. At the request of parents in the Pasadena, Calif., suburban district, these old-fashioned methods are on trial in a "fundamental school" for 950 elementary children, representing the ethnic makeup of the regular school population.

The children are drilled in double doses of reading, writing, spelling, and multiplication tables as well as the

new math. They are strictly disciplined and have daily homework assignments. Achievement test results are not yet available, but parents and teachers think children in the fundamental school are better behaved and are learning faster than those in the regular school.

Turning back the clock to the drill and discipline of yesteryear may increase the learning rate and promote good study habits in modern children. But is that enough? The basic math-language-science curriculums that prevail in many rural schools have not been preparing students to make their livings in the industrialized, computerized world of today -- and tomorrow. The failures have swelled the poverty districts and social problems of the cities.

Inadequate budgets, shortage of community resources, and poor community attitudes about the importance of education have hampered many rural schools. Others with good community support have improved and expanded curriculums to offer more learning opportunities.

Rural schools in different parts of the nation are proving that vocational and career education programs can succeed with community cooperation. Individualized, student-paced plans of instruction, non-graded programs, and multiple-class teaching (offering more than one subject to two or more groups in the same room) increase learning opportunities for students and make better use of teachers for more children.

Sharing teachers in specialized subjects among several small schools and cooperative plans with community, state, and federal agencies and organizations have enabled other rural schools to improve curriculums and services.

Curriculum planning is a continuous process. Rural schools are accountable for curriculums that satisfy the needs and interests of the children of their communities and change with changing conditions in the community and the total society. By regular review of programs, accountability can encourage adjustments and new approaches to improve the curriculums of rural schools.

THE COMMUNITY IS A PARTNER

Churches, civic and social groups, 4-H clubs, businesses, local government agencies, extension services, farmers organizations, and individual members of a community have roles in the education of children. They are responsible legally as citizens for maintaining a public school, but the kind of physical plant, curriculum, and services they provide depends greatly on their attitudes about the importance of education.

Some rural communities consider schools top priority institutions for financial and moral support. Lackadaisical communities whose citizens put little stock in education usually have poor schools.

In the concept of accountability the community and its school are partners, working together to determine and carry out educational goals. The results? States with the longest experience in accountability systems say that community participation has renewed confidence in the schools. Community advisory committees for local schools have been good for student affairs, community-school relations, and curriculum planning.

Rural schools in close-knit communities with common interests may have committees that agree readily on the educational needs of children. In districts of widely-separated families and communities with mixed populations of longtime and new residents, mail and telephone surveys can help the committee gather a consensus of opinions.

Rural communities can help to improve their schools but agreement on goals is important for success. The clearer the idea a community has of what its children need the better the chances of getting what it wants. Community cooperation has provided resources for many rural schools to establish vocational and career education courses, special education for children with learning and physical handicaps, and cultural enrichment and bilingual programs. Neighboring communities with similar interests have coordinated resources in shared programs.

Three rural districts in the desert country of southern California, for example, worked together to convert a bus into a mobile art museum. Civic clubs, community agencies, and personnel from museums and regional colleges cooperated with the schools to develop the shared project. Community interest in bilingual education influenced curriculums in several Southwestern states with large Mexican-American populations many years before the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 provided federal funds.

The operation of rural schools is usually expensive because they are small. The per-pupil cost in a rural high school with 10 teachers and 100 children is as high as that of a large city school with an extensive curriculum and services. Rural communities whose schools are hard-pressed to support needed programs can be accountable for cooperative planning to make wise use of available funds and backing movements to secure supplementary financing for rural schools.

Senior citizens make up an increasing percentage of the population in rural communities and they are not always

sympathetic with modern educational methods or children's behavior. "Schools pamper kids ... ought to be using the old hickory stick," they may say. "I've paid taxes for three generations of kids -- that's enough!" is a frequent response to school bond issues.

A new movement to let senior citizens and other adults go back to school promises to bring them into the educational picture. The purpose of community education is to make the school a round-the-clock learning center, open to adults when not in use for children.

More than 600 school districts nationwide have already developed community education projects. Recent Congressional approval of a community education bill will probably bring federal support and encourage plans in more communities. Grownups, especially retirees with leisure for study and parents who want to keep up with their children, have been responding enthusiastically to extension and continuing education courses wherever they have been offered.

Development of rural schools as community learning centers can make fuller use of the physical plant and let citizens share in what their taxes have provided for their children. The school will be theirs, as well as their children's school.

Using the school as an adult educational facility may be a new purpose but the schoolhouse has a long tradition in the life and activities of most rural communities. It is often the biggest building in town and a multi-purpose center. It's the polling place on election day and where the farm bureau holds its monthly covered dish supper. On a Saturday

night in the ranching areas of the West, the walls may resound with the music of fiddles and guitars and the calls of the square dance. If the church is too small to hold the crowds for a wedding or funeral, the schoolhouse can.

So, the rural school holds a meaningful place in its community. Accountability strengthens its importance as an educational institution and emphasizes the community's responsibility to help the school provide the needed learning opportunities for its children.

STUDENTS MUST DO THE LEARNING

Given knowledge and motivation, most children would learn by themselves. But they learn at different rates and any child may learn at a different rate in different circumstances. Some learn easily; others have serious learning problems. Some have behavior or emotional difficulties, physical handicaps, or language and cultural differences that interfere with learning.

The public school offers them all the privilege of a formal education. Teachers provide knowledge and help the learning but each child must discover for himself the meaning of the knowledge and the joy of learning. Johnny may learn to read but his desire to understand what is written is his personal experience.

Children are accountable for learning and for coming to their classes with a learning attitude. Just getting to school is not always easy for rural children from outlying parts of the district. Children from remote ranches in the West and Southwest often catch the school bus before sunrise and return home in the twilight hours.

Some rural schools have equipped buses with learning materials -- an audio-tape deck, for example -- to provide educational experiences for students who must travel long distances. But most children must be personally accountable for how they use their travel time -- reading or studying, playing games, or annoying the bus driver!

Since students must do the learning, should they have a chance to say what they would like to learn? More and more, the schools are saying yes. In the philosophy of accountability, student representatives plan local school programs with administrators, parents, teachers, and citizens.

Students are demonstrating their accountability, administrators say. Their opinions contribute an important dimension in planning and evaluating programs. They stick by their decisions and work harder for goals they have helped to set for themselves.

In rural schools that sponsor student government organizations, students have opportunities to practice citizenship and share ideas. They can be accountable for communicating with the administration about needs -- and gripes! -- of the student body.

Teachers may involve students in planning approaches to a subject or program phase or ask them to elect a committee to survey ideas about classroom activities. Administrators sometimes ask students to evaluate their teachers. Whenever students are given such opportunities for participation, they can be accountable for honest and thoughtful opinions.

The ties between rural schools and rural youth organizations -- especially Future Farmers and Homemakers and 4-H clubs -- have always been close and the activities often integrated with school programs. Membership is voluntary, but since these groups have educational objectives, students can be accountable for careful consideration of their decision to join or not to join. Students who participate have practical

learning experiences and opportunities for leadership and self-expression that can supplement the curriculum and services of rural schools.

Schools teach children the standards of fairness and justice basic to our democracy, and upholding them is a two-way accountability. Students are responsible for their behavior and observing the rules of the school, but they also have the legal right to an education for which the school is accountable.

Some children are natural troublemakers and no rural school can avoid having one now and then. When such a student interferes with the learning of other children, how far should administrators let him go? Should he be suspended temporarily or dismissed permanently? How many times should a dropout be permitted to re-enroll?

Questions like these may be resolved in conferences between parents and school personnel, but serious conflicts between schools and parents over student rights sometimes wind up in the courts. Grievance committees of administrators, teachers, parents, students, and school board members have been an aid in some schools. The committee holds hearings where students and parents can air complaints about alleged abuses of student rights.

Parental training strongly influences the accountability of students in rural -- and city -- schools. Work habits and experience in responsibility in the home usually carry over into the school setting. Many rural students, especially in agricultural areas, are responsible for regular

chores and sharing the family work load. They know how to apply themselves and make wise use of leisure time. Readiness to accept responsibility, coupled with the desire to learn, makes for accountable students and future citizens.

The community is accountable for the financial and moral support of schools and teachers are accountable for presenting knowledge in ways that students can understand. But students have the ultimate accountability. They must learn and, with the guidance and counsel of mature adults, discover how to apply the knowledge they encounter in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Accountability has emphasized that partnership between the school and community in planning goals and evaluating programs can be efficient. It has encouraged curriculum changes, new programs, new methods and skills in teaching, and cooperative school-community leadership to improve the quality of education and provide learning opportunities suited to the needs of local children.

Public reports satisfy citizens that children are getting what their taxes pay for and reform of education laws promises more equal funding, which would benefit rural schools.

Accountability has been misused in districts where teacher salary-adjustments were based on results of student-achievement tests and by school boards who assumed the right to hire and fire teachers. It has increased administrative expenses in some schools and has met stumbling blocks in die-hard administrators and teachers who do not like to change their ways.

Rural communities have a longstanding tradition of holding out for local control of their schools. Since accountability centers on community-school planning at the local level, it puts the responsibility for rural schools right where they have always wanted it. In this respect, rural schools have a head-start in accountability.

Accountability is a challenge to change -- to search for and try new educational programs and approaches to increase learning opportunities. Rural schools can be accountable for developing community leadership to work with administrators and teachers to determine present and future educational goals for rural children.