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## ABSTRACT

This report explores issues related to expanding the roles of schools and youth in rural community development. It is suggested that rural schools, when working in partnership with local leaders and residents, can have a positive impact on community viability. The report is based on a project involving a partnership between a local school system and a rural Midwest community, and a second project implementing school-to-work transition in an isolated rural Midwest community. Research suggests that if community development efforts are to be successful, they must build social capital, and this requires developing strong linkages between the community and the school. Approaches for building school-community linkages include establishing the school as a community center that serves as both a resource for community learning and the center for the delivery of community services; integrating the community into the curriculum; and developing school-based enterprises that allow students to develop entrepreneurial skills while meeting a service need in their communities. Sustaining community-based programs requires strong support from community organizations, groups, individuals, and leaders. The report describes how three rural communities in the Midwest implemented policies that contributed to the success and survival of their community-based programs. Strategies for developing effective policy support include capitalizing on the effectiveness of youth as advocates and policymakers, building coalitions, being patient and persistent, educating public officials, using the budgeting process as a policy tool, covering all bases, and obtaining solid information and data about why the program should be granted policy status. Contains 25 references. (LP)

# PROGRAM REPORT

ED 393 617

## THE ROLE OF RURAL SCHOOLS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: POLICY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Prepared by  
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July 31, 1995

Rural Education Program  
Steve Nelson, Director

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**THE ROLE OF RURAL SCHOOLS IN COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT: POLICY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

**Prepared by Bruce Miller**

**Rural Education Program**

**July 1995**

## INTRODUCTION

*At the present time many of the most innovative community leaders are rediscovering that youth can be essential contributors to the well-being and vitality of the community. Projects that connect young people productively with other youth and adults are now seen to be the foundations upon which healthy communities can be built. But for this task to be accomplished, youth must no longer be relegated to the margins of community life (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 29)*

Over the last decade, efforts have been under way to help rural schools be more responsive to the growth and survival needs of their communities (Nachtigal, Haas, Parker, & Brown, 1989; Miller, 1991; Spears, Combs, & Bailey, 1990; Israel, Coleman, & Ilvento, 1993). These efforts have been driven by numerous factors and trends effecting rural communities, often in deleterious ways. For example, low population density and geographic isolation have made rural communities especially vulnerable to the economic, social, and environmental trends emerging from the nation's move away from local manufacturing and resource based industries, toward a multi-national, global economy. Mining, logging, agriculture, and manufacturing, once robust industries in rural America, have come to a near standstill, leaving high rates of unemployment with attendant problems of social and economic distress (Fuguitt, 1994; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995). Despite these downturns, rural America and its people remain a vital national asset.

Rural communities often reflect such valued norms as helping one's neighbor, strong work ethics, low crime rates, environmental quality, and a *we can do it* community spirit that provides fertile ground for creating a capacity for revitalization. Of paramount importance has been the role of school resources in assisting community development efforts, especially its youth. Although the school has generally played an active role in rural communities, it has often been constrained by educator and community conceptions of schooling that limit learning opportunities within the perimeters of the school's walls and the textbooks.

This report will explore policy issues and implications related to expanding conceptions of the role schools and youth can play in rural community growth and survival. In developing this report, information and data have been drawn from varied resources such as review and analysis of community develop research literature and research related to rural education. However, the primary source of data has been based on working directly with rural schools and communities.

Two main projects inform this report. Since 1990, the Rural Education Program at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory has been engaged with three isolated, rural communities in the northwest in a project designed to address rural community distress. The program focused on building community capacity by drawing on the inherent strengths and assets of the community, with special attention centered around building a partnership between the local school system, community organizations, groups, and individuals (Miller,

1994). Through such project activities as community-wide meetings and training sessions, interviews, site visits, and formative evaluation symposia, a wealth of information and insight have been gained.

The second source of data comes from a project designed to document promising practices of school-to-work transition in isolated rural communities. Three isolated rural schools were chosen because they demonstrated the benefits to be gained by using community assets as a resource for helping youth acquire knowledge and skills required for work and being a productive member of the community.

Collectively, data from these two projects demonstrate that, given the opportunities, rural schools can not only provide resources for community development, but can assist youth in learning to appreciate their rural communities by helping them play a meaningful role as an active, contributing community member.

### **Community Development and Social Capital**

Community development reflects any effort designed to improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of the community. However, community development specialists have tended to focus on economics and thus failing to recognize the interdependent nature of these three dimensions.

In the past, it may have been the case that focusing on economic issues was all that was needed to keep rural communities viable. But with the globalization of the economy and the rapid urbanization of rural areas, there has been an accompanying break down in community solidarity. Businesses have closed, the young and well educated are leaving for metropolitan areas, and many social services, including schools, have been regionalized or consolidated as cost cutting measures (Bryant & Grady, 1990; Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Miller, 1991). These trends have lead to high levels of unemployment and the deterioration of rural economic, social, and environmental well-being. Recent evidence seems to suggest that if community development efforts are to have a chance of success, they need to address the importance of social capital, especially for the long-term maintenance of successful change efforts.

Social capital, according to Putnam (1993), "refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (pp. 35-36). In studying community changes in the 1970s, Putnam looked at why some communities prospered while others languished. He attributed successes to "strong traditions of civic engagement--voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and literary circles, Lions clubs, and soccer clubs--are hallmarks of a successful region . . . these 'civic communities' value solidarity, civic participation, and integrity. And here democracy works" (p. 36). In communities that failed to implement their goals, Putnam discovered a breakdown or disintegration of community cohesiveness characterized by low levels of trust and cooperation across diverse elements of the community. As a result, there was little that bound the community together so they were reticent to take collective action. In other words, these communities could not get beyond personal, self

interest in order to act for the common good.

Flora & Flora (1993) use the terms Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure (ESI) to describe their view of social capital, which involves three interrelated elements:

1. *Symbolic diversity* refers to those aspects of the community that create a real sense of inclusiveness, where the diverse elements of the community are viewed as valuable and necessary to successful community development.
2. *Resource mobilization* refers to the equitable distribution of resources, a willingness to invest collectively, and the investment of private capital locally.
3. *Quality of linkages* refers to the networks within the community and between the community and the outside world that facilitate the flow of information that helps ensure quality decisionmaking. Where a quality of linkages exist, there is a broad base of decisionmakers and leadership is distributed across this broad base (p. 52-53).

Coleman (1987) describes social capital as resources that are imbedded in the social structure itself such as norms, social networks, and interpersonal relationships that contribute to a child's growth. Unlike Flora and Flora and Putnam, whose emphasis centers around social capital and its relationship to community development, Coleman emphasizes the impact of social capital on children.

Taken together these authors provide a foundation upon which to build conceptual understanding about the strategic role schools and youth can play in community development. Clearly, the school represents an important element in the community's social capital. Too often, however, local schools have seen themselves only as an educational resource for the community's youth. Ironically, the community has generally been viewed solely as a revenue resource for sustaining operation of the schools. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) have pointed out the valuable role schools can play:

As schools have become more professionalized and centralized, they have tended to distance themselves from their local communities. The vital links between experience, work, and education have been weakened. As a result, public and private schools in many rural and urban communities have lost their power as a valuable community resource. And many economically distressed towns, communities, and neighborhoods have begun to struggle toward economic revitalization without the valuable contributions of the local schools (p. 209).

### **Rethinking the Role of the School**

Many rural advocates feel a promising direction for revitalization and survival rests with the social capital that can be created by building and sustaining strong linkages between the community and the school (Hobbs, 1991; Miller, 1991; Monk & Haller, 1986; Nachtigal,

Haas, Parker, & Brown, 1989; Spears, Combs, & Bailey, 1990). Rural communities may have a head start in developing these linkages because schools have traditionally played a central role in the life of the communities. Besides providing for basic education, they have often served as a cultural center in the community where athletics, drama programs, music, and other social activities play a vital part in community life and identity. However, building a strong partnership with the school for community development purposes remains a major challenge because it is not generally viewed as a traditional element of schooling.

Some schools and communities have met this challenge and managed to restructure elements of schooling to provide experiences for students that serve both educational needs and community development goals (Stern, Stone III, Hopkins, McMillion, & Crain, 1994; Versteeg, 1993; Spears, Combs, & Bailey, 1990). In Broadus, Montana, students have worked along side adults on a project aimed at community revitalization. Students participated in community-wide visioning, goal setting, and served on task force groups where they helped write and implement plans to achieve community development. For example, students served on a beautification task force to redesign local buildings using a western theme. This required working with residents, an architect, and school staff.

Other students served on a recreation task force where they remodeled a school classroom into a recreation center for youth. In still another case, they worked on a tourism task force to create several community attractions. Guided by a local artist, they painted a huge mural on the side of a building depicting the four seasons of their prairie community. They have also conducted clean-up campaigns, helped start a recycling program, created a wayside park, and worked with local businesses to develop a local area service directory (Miller, 1993).

In Saco, Montana, students have developed a recreation center that is open to everyone in the community in a building on main street. Working with faculty advisors, students have formed a community advisory committee, developed a governance structure, and written successful grants to remodel the facility. Using computer drafting programs, students have designed plans for remodeling. Students also took correspondence courses in interior design and used the recreation center project as a real-life opportunity to apply what they had learned. Community volunteers have taught students to hang and prepare sheet rock for painting, wire electrical fixtures, and install plumbing (Miller, 1995a).

In the north central cascades of Washington State, the Methow School District implemented a comprehensive community-based learning project called, Community as a Classroom. A local resident coordinates more than 200 activities and classes taught by community volunteers to high school students. For 11 weeks during the fall and the winter, students are dismissed for a half-day each week to participate in the Community as a Classroom. The program is organized around four strands: (1) career/jobs skills; (2) leisure and recreational time activities; (3) informational classes; and (4) community service. In the spring, they participate in an intensive two-day experience that may range from firefighter training with the Forest Service to backpacking and survival.



Students benefit from their involvement in multiple ways. They learn valuable workplace competencies, opportunities to test out their vocational and recreational interests, and to develop meaningful relationships with the adults in their community. Most students also discover summer and part-time employment opportunities through the positive relationships they establish with local businesses and organizations. Moreover, the community benefits in multiple ways as well. Local businesses are able to tap into a reliable employment pool. Students provide meaningful opportunities for adults to teach and return something to the community. Students also provide community service and development help to local groups and organizations needing assistance in completing projects.

The success of the Methow Valley program centers around the overwhelming level of community involvement and support, the fact that all students in the high school participate, and that students are actively involved in planning and choosing activities and classes. The program is in its fourth year and continuing to grow (Miller, 1995b).

The schools and communities of Broadus, Saco and the Methow Valley represent rural communities overcoming their isolation through establishing collaborative relationships with their respective communities. In so doing, they open the way for students to engage in meaningful community-based learning experiences where students, working along side community adults, gain an increased appreciation of their communities while contributing to a sustainable future.

These three rural communities illustrate how strong linkages can be built between the school and the community which serve to strengthen and sustain a mutually viable future. Teacher, administrative, and school board action provided a framework of permission within which community-based learning opportunities could happen. Neither students, teachers, administrators, nor community members acted in isolation. Changes in their respective communities occurred because they worked together and because adults recognized the value of youth for the future of their communities. Although such examples of youth and school involvement in the community seem quite rare, there have always been educators and community members who have understood the vital importance such experiences play in the lives of youth and the future health and well-being of the community.

### **Building Community-School Linkages**

Three unique, yet overlapping approaches that build strong linkages between schools and communities have been identified (Miller, 1992). Each approach reflects learning opportunities and experiences that cross boundaries which have traditionally separated the community as a place of learning from the school.

The first approach reflects the school as a community center, serving as both a resource for lifelong learning and as a vehicle for the delivery of a wide range of services (Everson, 1994). School resources such as facilities, technology, and a well-educated staff can provide a range of educational and retraining opportunities for the community. An early manifestation of this approach was the community school movement of the 70s where educational opportunities

ranging from day care to adult literacy were offered (Minzey & LeTarte, 1972). In recent years, the idea of school as community center has resurfaced in the concept of integrated family services, where the school serves as a linking agent for the social service needs of rural youth and families (Stoops & Hull, 1993). These may include health screening, day care, and dental treatment. In Saco, Montana, the school district has been funded for a fiber optic network linking three remote communities together. The network will provide training for health professionals and fire departments. Moreover, it will network schools and communities together thus facilitating the sharing of resources (Miller, 1995a).

A second approach uses the community as curriculum, emphasizing the study of community in all its various dimensions. Students generate information for community development by conducting needs assessments, studying and monitoring environmental and land-use patterns, and by documenting local history through interviews and photo essays. Nachtigal has written extensively in this area (see, Nachtigal, Haas, Parker, & Brown, 1989). He points out that when students study their community and are directly involved with local residents, it helps them value their community. The most comprehensive approach to community as curriculum in terms of sustained use nationally is the Foxfire network which provides teacher development and a teacher support network (Foxfire Fund, 1990). Foxfire engages students in learning about their community through direct encounters with its history. In Broadus, Montana, students learned to interview residents and locate and analyze historical documents in order to reconstruct and preserve the historical context of their community for future generations.

A third approach, school-based enterprise (SBE), places a major emphasis on developing entrepreneurial skills whereby students not only identify potential service needs in their rural communities, but actually establish a business to address those needs. Sher and DeLargy have turned the SBE concept into a comprehensive curriculum program for rural schools called REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning). With the help of REAL, students have set up shoe repair, a delicatessen, and day-care businesses, providing both employment and filling a service not formally available (Stern, Stone, Hopkins, McMillion & Crain, 1994). Like Foxfire, it is a comprehensive program of curriculum, training, and a support network.

These three interrelated approaches provide a way to think about how schools and communities can work together for their mutual benefit. The value of these community-based learning experiences are the long-term benefits of leadership development, a renewed sense of civic responsibility, and a revitalized sense of community. However, because these approaches reflect a departure from the more traditional ways educators and communities have viewed curriculum (i.e., more school and textbook bound), it becomes imperative to develop policy support from those organizations and individuals whose endorsement may be critical to the success of program efforts.

## Lessons and Implications for Policy

In order to better assess the implications for practice and policy, NWREL staff conducted an invitational symposium on community-based learning experiences for youth in rural communities. A total of 28 youth and adults representing successful community-based initiatives from the northwest, Georgia, South Dakota and Colorado participated in the symposium. Six areas of expertise were discussed and shared. These included: (1) broad-based community involvement, (2) community-based curriculum, (3) community development, (4) service learning, (5) education-to-work, and (6) school-based enterprise. Lastly, participants working together in small groups responded to two questions:

1. What has contributed to the success of your community-based project(s)?
2. What recommendations do you have for others considering community-based learning (e.g., community development, service learning, Foxfire, REAL, etc.)?

A summary of participant responses has been presented in Table 1, where attributes and their descriptions have been ranked by level of importance. However, it needs to be kept in mind that these attributes represent not a set of independent variables, but rather a set of tightly interrelated and interdependent elements. Nearly every program described by participants included these elements, but with variation in emphasis.

Many elements of the community and school need attention if efforts to link them together for development purposes are to be implemented and sustained over time. Most important, developing a support base in the community provides a strong foundation upon which to build lasting community-based learning experiences. Secondly, engaging teachers in curriculum work that links student service activities in the classroom with projects in the community appears to be critically important (Sharratt, McClain, & Zehm, 1993). Programs like Foxfire and REAL may provide a beginning curriculum framework upon which to help teachers and students see the potential value of community-based learning experiences, thus paving the way for greater involvement in community development.

Finally, long-term sustainability of a community-school development partnership should be a primary aim. For the test of success will be whether a new and empowering partnership between the community and school has been created that can meaningfully impact the lives of rural youth and adults over an extended period of time. Moreover, it needs to be kept in mind that the changes implied in building a community-school development partnership where students engage in community-based learning experiences are essentially questions about changing the way schools go about preparing rural youth for the future.

By starting with the premise that community needs and school needs are interrelated, we create opportunities to explore ways that students and the school could address community needs while helping students learn valuable life skills. This is as true or even more true for rural areas as it is for urban areas.

**Table 1**

**The Ten Most Frequently Mentioned Attributes Leading to Successful Community-Based Learning for Students**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Description</b>
1	<b>Involve and empower students in all aspects of program or project</b>	Students are viewed as important, contributing members of the community. Class time is scheduled so student involvement becomes part of the regular academic day. The community is made continuously aware of student contributions and the skills achieved by their involvement. Students of all ages are involved.
2	<b>Develop broad-based support for the change</b>	Involving local residents in every step of change: project design, implementation, evaluation and revisions. This means including local experts, "nay sayers/opposition", students, teachers, parents, economic development groups, political affiliations, various age groups, respected and effective leaders, administrators, locals with historical roots, and advocates. The whole community needs to be informed and a support base developed.
3	<b>Resource identification</b>	Identifying resources that will move the project forward, beginning with the strengths that exist locally. In other words, what are the assets we already have: students, grant writers, technology, individuals with interest and motivation, and those who have access to information? Identify needed resources: funding/grants and consultants/outside expertise.
4	<b>Having a common vision</b>	This area involves having a clear vision of where the project is going early on in the process, especially one that provides common ground across the diversity of the community. It is especially important that the school and community have a shared vision with buy-in from community, staff and students. There should also be an ongoing assessment of the vision's appropriateness, with adjustments being made as necessary.
5	<b>Having a structured process</b>	There needs to be a clearly definable management structure to organize the community development process. Activities cannot be random. There must be a process to build vision, identify strengths and needs, set goals, create time to share, build commitment, learn group processes that provide for equitable sharing of ideas from across the community, and adequate planning. It was also suggested that hiring a project coordinator be considered.
6	<b>Emphasis on group process and team effort</b>	Cooperation and consensus are necessary. They require creating a safe, positive meeting environment characterized by good group process. This means creating an open, honest dialogue among community members through training, team building, conflict resolution, sharing models, and visiting others who are successful.

**Table 1. Continued**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Description</b>
7	Developing and maintaining community (students, residents, and educators) awareness of community strengths, needs, and projects	Develop a realistic picture of the conditions existing in the community that require action. Help residents become aware of the diversity of resources that exists in students and helping students develop an understanding of the strengths and values of the community.
8	Identify and develop local leadership	Identify people in the community and school who have energy, push, and community credibility. They need to be able to communicate the shared vision. Forming a leadership team to help structure activities was suggested.
9	Celebrate accomplishments on an ongoing basis	Document and publicize the successes. Do this in a planned way. Make it part of evaluation and assessment activities. Everyone should feel rewarded by their participation and efforts should lead to positive community change.
10	Creating a productive, safe climate for change	Attend to building and sustaining positive relationships. Meetings should take place in a safe, positive environment where all ideas are honored, accepted, and processed. People need to feel it is OK to take risks and there needs to be motivation and buy in to the change.

### **Lessons for Students**

1. Community development provides a substantive alternative whereby students can experience and develop many of the competencies required of our future workforce while simultaneously providing valuable service to the community that not only helps transform the community, but also helps to positively transform student beliefs and attitudes about their rural community.
2. By providing rural youth with opportunities to become active, responsible members of a community that works together, we help them see rural communities as a positive choice among many places to live and work.
3. Involving students in real-life community-based planning and development will help them learn and use important life skills.

### **Lessons for Schools and Communities**

1. Using assistance from outside the community which serves as a catalyst for helping meet community needs appears to be more effective than outside interventions, which presume to prescribe a course of action.

2. Developing a grass-roots support base among the diverse constituent groups in the community provides a strong foundation upon which to build lasting community-based learning experiences.
3. A major gulf often exists between schools and their communities. Recognizing and crossing that gulf needs to be a major focus:
  - Link curriculum requirements to community development activities.
  - Be supportive to teachers with time and resources to develop connecting activities
  - Recognize teachers who incorporate community-based elements into their classrooms even if they don't directly participate in community activities
  - Demonstrate results early on in the process. Results need to be viewed as *small wins* such as the capacity to work in small groups, find information, write grants, and assume leadership; and product outcomes such as a new park, a newsletter, or a tutoring program.
  - The common thread shared by schools and communities is their youth as valued, active members.

### **The Importance of Policy in Creating and Sustaining Community-School Linkages**

Policy, simply defined, is permission or resources (Murphy, 1995). As permission, it operates in three ways:

1. *'may'* - a policy that makes something possible (p. 3), such as a school board resolution to participate in a program of community service.
2. *'may not'* - a policy that repeals permission or prohibits something (p. 3), such as a school board policy that prohibits students from leaving the campus during school hours.
3. *'must'* - a policy that requires something, (p. 3) such as a state policy requiring all students to be covered by insurance when they are involved in school sponsored activities.

Policy can be defined as resources because many policies contain resource provisions such as personnel, insurance, facilities or other resources necessary for implementing or operating a program. One example would be a board resolution allowing for an empty classroom to be used as a community resource room. Whether policy reflects a condition of permission or resource allocation it serves to increase the likelihood that a program will be implemented

and institutionalized or sustained over time. Policy also serves to legitimize and lend credibility to an effort. Murphy (1995) suggests policy serves five essential purposes:

1. helping institutionalize programs and thus improve the likelihood of sustainability;
2. providing resources that can help programs develop and expand;
3. granting permission to act, thus making it easier for programs to develop and grow;
4. providing a legal basis upon which to generate resource support from the private sector; and
5. lending credibility and legitimacy to programs (p. 4).

Several examples will help to illustrate these five policy aims which can contribute to the success and survival of community-based education projects. In Broadus, Montana and the other two pilot sites for Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's community-school development partnership program, school boards were to pass a resolution to participate in the project. In addition, other sponsoring organizations in the community such as economic development councils and/or the community's mayor were requested to send a letter of support and participation. Taken together, these letters granted permission and support for the communities and schools to participate. Moreover, these endorsements provided a basis upon which to request additional funding from other agencies, businesses and organizations.

When the Methow Valley School District implemented their program, Community as a Classroom, school officials wrote a state grant that provided funding for the project. The school board passed a resolution endorsing the grant. After three years of implementation, the program had developed broad-based support and acceptance. However, funding prematurely ended because of a legislative rollback. As a result, the school board incorporated the cost of running the program into the general fund budget, thus putting the program on a more stable basis. Because of the demonstrated support of the program, the school board granted *permission* and *resources* for continued operation.

In Saco, Montana, when students sought support for creating a community recreation center in their community, they worked closely with the superintendent and principal in order to develop support. Students formed parent and student advisory boards to help guide program development, that included both design and policy components. When students wrote their Serve America grants, they secured permission from their advisory boards and the board of education. As a result, board resolutions supporting the student development of a recreation center provided both credibility and visibility to the project.

These illustrations demonstrate the pivotal place policy plays in program development and survival. Moreover, it reveals that program design, implementation, and survival, at some point in development process, becomes a group or collaborative endeavor if it is to be sustained.

## Strategies for Developing Effective Policy Support

How does one go about building support for a project and turning that support into effective policies? Murphy (1995, pp. 1-10) describes seven general strategies that have been effective in the development and implementation of community service learning projects across the country. Although these tactics grew primarily from state level policy development, they provide a useful beginning framework for thinking about policy creation at the building and school district levels. Each strategy will be briefly described, followed by an illustration of its use drawn from rural community-based program development efforts.

### 1. Capitalize on the effectiveness of youth as advocates and policymakers

Allow students and those effected by the program to speak for themselves, describing why there needs to be policy supporting community-based learning.

**EXAMPLE:** In Broadus, Montana, students serving on a community development task force for building linkages between local businesses and the school developed a plan for career shadowing. Students presented their plans and how career shadowing would benefit both students and local businesses. As a result, board policy was written which granted permission for the project, including allocation of resources such as time, insurance, and travel.

### 2. Build coalitions

A single individual may have impact on program and policy development, but single individuals cannot do it alone. By bringing in a broad cross-section of individuals, groups, and organizations one can build a power base of support that can demonstrate to policymakers the worth of a project.

**EXAMPLE:** In Tonasket, Washington, a community council had been created in order to implement a community development partnership between the community and the school district. A coalition of the Tonasket Economic Development Committee, the city mayor, the school board, and a broad base of individuals representing the diverse constituency within the community formed a community council that was able to leverage resources from the state's economic development department for hiring a project coordinator.

### 3. Be patient and persistent

Change does not happen over night, but requires persistent, long term commitment. According to Murphy, in Minnesota, "It took five years from the first serious discussion on developing a state youth service policy to the passage of comprehensive youth service legislation" (p. 7).



**EXAMPLE:** In 1991, students in Saco, Montana, began informally discussing the idea of having a place for students and the community to go for recreation. In 1995, a youth-designed and developed recreation center opened on the community's main street with a dance for the graduating class.

4. Educate public officials

The success of a piece of policy is dependent on individuals who have adequate knowledge and understanding of the issues relating to the policy. Helping those individuals who can influence policy decisions is key. Invite officials to spend time with projects, students, teachers, and community advocates who have knowledge and experience. Seeing and hearing is often more influential than reading.

**EXAMPLE:** In Cottonwood, Idaho, a community-school development partnership has been implemented. A recreation task force presented their ideas for a summer youth and family recreation program to a cross section of the community, including the school superintendent and school board representatives. The task force proposal recommended the program be held at the local elementary school and be staffed by volunteers. Support for the summer recreation program was unanimous and the school board adopted policies that made available school facilities and materials.

5. Use the budgeting process as a policy tool

The budgeting process provides an excellent opportunity for establishing priorities. These priorities tend to drive the policy agenda for the organization and/or the community. Link existing priorities to new efforts, showing how the new effort can expand or extend current practices, can create more return on the dollar.

**EXAMPLE:** In the Methow Valley, money was reallocated to support the Community as a Classroom program when the existing state grant ended. By demonstrating to the school board and the budgeting committee that Community as a Classroom program provided career and job exploration opportunities not available elsewhere, funds were authorized to continue the program.

6. Cover all bases

Ensure that all constituent groups who can influence the policy effort be involved and/or understand and support the effort (or at least are not against it). Sometimes, not being included can lead to opposition to an idea that would have been supported. Key groups to consider are: the teacher's association, administrators, parent and community groups, state agencies, and influential individuals.

**EXAMPLE:** When the task force for community-school relations in Tonasket wanted to buy a local building and turn it into a community culture center where youth, especially those who had dropped out or were at risk of

dropping out could go, they sought support from local government through the mayor. The task force formed a board of directors, wrote by-laws and obtained non-profit status. The center is now in its third year of operation.

7. Do your homework

Solid information and data is more effective than passionate appeals alone. In other words, policymakers may be interested in your impassioned speech if it is short, but they would rather hear, in concrete and demonstrable terms, why your program should be granted policy status. However, data need not always be in terms of statistics or numbers. Data can be in more qualitative formats such as interviews and documents which show how a program has effected or may effect students and the community.

**EXAMPLE:** In Broadus, Montana, the community council organized and held a conference for the community on external trends impact rural communities in Montana. State tourism and transportation specialists, a rural demography, environmental groups, coal development advocates, and education-to-work specialist participated in the conference. Over 80 community residence attended the conference as active participants. The conference was followed the next day by a heavily attended community meeting designed to create a community-school development vision to guide the work of their community-school partnership.

## CONCLUSION

Rural schools, working in partnership with local leaders and residents, can have a positive impact on community viability. This is especially true when students, working alongside adults, are given meaningful opportunities to engage in community-based learning that serves the needs of the community while simultaneously addressing the learning needs of students. By building the social capital of the school and youth, the community not only helps to develop responsible citizens, but also creates opportunities for tomorrow's leaders to emerge. However, without building strong support among community organizations, groups, individuals, and leaders and shoring up that support through policy development, it is unlikely community-based program initiatives will last. Policy provides the basis upon which a program can sustain support over time. The most successful program such as those found in rural communities like Broadus, Montana or the Methow Valley in Washington have sustained their programs far beyond the formative stages by ensuring provisions in school district policy that grant them permission and resource to exist.

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