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AUTHOR	Collins, Timothy; Branham, Dan
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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a model in which the rural school becomes an active agent in community economic development through leadership development and civic education. Families, school, and community are the three pillars of public education, and the concept of community engagement is crucial to rebuilding this educational partnership and creating an atmosphere conducive to building leadership that sustains both the school and the community. Whereas community involvement is coordinated by school officials to fill school needs and communication is from the top down, community engagement emphasizes two-way communication. School administrators provide leadership, but they also cultivate leadership in the community by coordinating talents and skills of community members, listening to citizens' concerns, and building the trust necessary to engage in reforms to improve the school's performance. Obstacles exist in four categories: systemic (inside and outside the school system) and personal (school staff and citizens). Because school officials hold the reins of power and finances, they have to take the first steps. This is not easy, because they often fear losing their power, but sharing power can actually enhance their position by broadening their base of support. Several models for reconstituting politics are presented that emphasize more democratic participation in schools, and ways of developing leadership, especially among youth, are discussed. The long-term benefits of school-community partnerships include leadership development, renewed civic responsibility, and a revitalized sense of community. (Contains 20 references and 18 related Web sites.) (TD)

Developing Shared Youth and Adult Leadership within Communities

By Timothy Collins
and Dan Branham

The Rural Specialty at AEL, Inc.
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348
304-347-0419

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> I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.
>
> **--Thomas Jefferson**

Public school reform is nothing new. But the past 15 or so years have seen widespread changes as states have scrutinized schools in response to pressure from the federal government, lawsuits, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and citizens. Reform pressure also comes from the constantly changing global economy, democratic impulses spurred by government devolution, the rise of high-speed information technology, and the ability of firms to move jobs around the world easily. Rural schools have felt these demands for change, and they have to respond on a variety of fronts even as their own communities are undergoing rapid changes at the same time. All of this change is tiring, and school leaders may need help in adapting, especially in rural communities, where resources may seem to be in short supply. One solution may be to develop new leadership among adults and youth in the community.

Where will the leadership come from? Family . . . Community . . . Schools . . . are the three "pillars" of public education. From them, public schooling draws its strength, received its mission, and developed as an institution in our society. Families, schools, and communities have formed a partnership over the years, at times

resembling reciprocal giving-getting compact. Schools prepare our children to assume their place within communities as productive workers and responsible, able citizens. Historically, schools have helped transmit cultural values that undergird our family structure and unify our society. In turn, families and communities have supplied the financial, moral, and practical support our schools rely upon to fulfill their mission (AEL, forthcoming). Yet, massive changes in our society now find many who seriously question the mission and function of schools.

The challenge is how to rebuild and fortify the educational partnership so rural families and communities can reassert their legitimate interests in schools and become constructively involved in educating children for community leadership. Under these changing and demanding conditions, rural schools have the opportunity to develop community leadership that will sustain not only the mission of the school, but also the community. We offer for your consideration today the idea of school-community engagement to help build effective youth and adult leaders for today and tomorrow.

Why Community Engagement?

Community engagement marshals the energy, talent, and commitment of families (parents and students), business leaders, taxpayers, and others to create an atmosphere conducive to building leadership that sustains both the school and the community. It takes a conscious decision by school officials to directly involve community members in school and community-building activities. The idea is to build

stakeholder support for the school. This will help the school and the larger community by building community leadership.

Many schools already have **community involvement**. Parents and community members help with duplicating papers, preparing treats for parties, working as athletic boosters, acting as band parents, and the like. In the case of community involvement, community members tend to follow the instructions of administrators and teachers, filling an important helping role. Communication tends to be from the top down, although suggestions may be welcome in certain cases. School involvement is coordinated by school officials to fill school needs.

In the model we propose, school administrators must think in new and different ways, emphasizing **two-way** communication **for community engagement**. School administrators provide leadership, but they also cultivate leadership *in the community,* outside the walls of the school. They coordinate talents and skills of community members and school staff to work together both to improve the school and to make the community a better place to live. They listen to citizens' concerns about schools in new ways and develop partnerships to deal with those concerns, while building the trust necessary to engage in reforms designed to improve the school's performance.

The notion of using the school to build leadership for community development is based on the belief that a good rural school is both served by and provides service to its community. In other words, the school plays an important role in developing the community, and the community plays an important role in developing the school. Both the school and the community benefit from mutual interaction, with

widespread public participation for collaborative planning and action (AEL, forthcoming). Such an arrangement offers many potential benefits for both the school and the community.

The school might benefit in these areas:

- establishing expectations across the community for high levels of academic performance for all students
- developing a more rigorous and relevant curriculum and teaching practices that allow students to learn challenging subject matter through real-life roles and situations
- developing a curriculum that emphasizes reasoning, problem solving, and understanding over simply memorizing facts, terms, and formulas
- creating opportunities for students to learn in, from, with, about, and for their own communities through interactions with community members and local resources
- finding better ways of using time, people, space, and other resources in meeting students' needs
- creating an atmosphere to recruit and support teachers who have a deep understanding of both the subject matter and the learning processes that actively engage students
- increasing the school's resources to help meet its mission of building leadership among students and adult community members.

The community might benefit in these areas:

- building new knowledge about the school and its programs
- building knowledge about the community and its resources

- gathering people from the community with common interests
- increasing citizens' on-the-job and civic skills
- involving citizens in creating a vision for and meeting the goals of a community-based school
- pooling school and community resources to improve community life
- developing new leadership in the community, strengthening the resilience of both the school and the community in times of change

Obstacles and Pitfalls

Developing community leadership is no easy task. Table 1 divides potential obstacles into four categories: systemic-inside and outside the school system-and personal-school staff and citizens. Systemic obstacles are flaws (perceived and real) that are related to the organization of the school or the larger society. They may be difficult or impossible to change, especially if they are legal obstacles. Personal obstacles are a different matter. They are under the control of individuals, and may be easier to change than systemic obstacles, if the individuals are willing to change.

Often, school officials can deal directly with school system and personal obstacles related to administration, faculty, and staff. But they can only mitigate effects of systemic obstacles outside the school system and personal obstacles related to parents and other citizens. If factors outside of the school are significant in a particular place, administrators will be in a difficult, but not

Table 1: Real and Perceived Obstacles to School-Community interactions.

Systemic

Inside school system	**Outside school system**
Intimidating, complex system	High poverty levels
Legal, bureaucratic control of institution, ownership of planning processes	Democratic impulses, community solidarity stifled
School politics	Lack of employment opportunities; loss of students through out-migration once educated
Clashing values	Clashing values--no education tradition or clear agreement on it
Social diversity a challenge	Class, racial, and ethnic distance
Economy of "one best way" of doing tasks	High illiteracy rates, low education levels
Economy, politics of inertia, *status quo*	Rural/neighborhood geography, distance
Ivory tower mentality—physical and institutional distance from community, businesses, agencies	Lack of business, local government, or community support

Personal

School staff	**Citizens**
Blocks participation	Don't value education or community
Professional distance	Bad experiences in school
Professional vocabulary	Too busy with work, other family obligations
Too many responsibilities already	Don't feel ownership
Lack of expertise in working with public/Don't trust public	Rumors, misinformation, may not understand data
Fear of change	Fear of change
Fear of disagreements, challenges to power	Intimidated by staff, size of building
Personality clashes with outside leaders, citizens	Lack of technical expertise
Not in job description	Fear of disagreements, challenging people in power
	Personality clashes with school leaders
	Bad school experiences

Adapted from Collins, 1999; AEL (forthcoming); Collins (1998)

untenable position. This table illustrates how the school's problems are the community's problems, and how the community's problems are the school's problems. It suggests how important it is for school

officials to interact within the community to develop leadership for school and community development.

Community Agency: Empowerment of Schools and Communities

Coleman (1988) believes social capital to be a productive resource in a community. Swanson (1991) reconceptualizes social capital, terming it social infrastructure. He suggests that when social infrastructure is unconstrained, it can enhance community development efforts. A community's ability to act to achieve collective goals is termed "community agency" and is a product of the social infrastructure in a community. As Collins and Dewees (1999) point out, community development is dependent on developing social capital or social infrastructure that may be inhibited by local power structures. Even in rural communities where social infrastructure is inhibited, there may well be considerable untapped social infrastructure with diverse talents and energies.

Many obstacles to change outside the school system can be overcome if school officials are willing to engage community members in dealing with community issues. School administrators must be willing to take the necessary steps by committing to continuous improvement of two-way coordination of communications and collaboration between the school and all stakeholders. This is no panacea; there will still be politics. The object is to channel political wrangling toward positive ends by focusing on the needs of the school and larger community. As communication lines are established with various people and groups in the community, it is

crucial to foster trust and to then continue to build that trust. Because school officials hold the reins of power and finances, they have to be the ones to take the first steps. This is not easy, because school officials may well fear losing their power. It is important to overcome this fear and stop viewing parents and other stakeholders as adversaries or ignorant of what goes on in schools. One approach to overcoming this fear is to consider the possibility that power sharing can actually enhance the power of school officials by broadening their base of support in the community (AEL, forthcoming).

For rural communities, however, there are limits on what they can do in a world where much that happens is outside of their control. Yet, there are opportunities in the midst of the uncertainties. Giddens (1994:4-7) notes the major changes our world is undergoing. First, he defines globalization as **"action at a distance,"** noting that it is a "complex mixture of processes" that are contradictory, a source of conflicts and challenges to unity, and a source of new forms of social stratification. Second, he discusses the emergence of the **"post-traditional social order."** Traditions do not disappear, but are subject to questioning and discourse. Third, Giddens discusses the notion of expanded **"social reflexivity,"** in which individuals must filter information, interpret it, and act upon it in the wider world. Experts no longer have a lock on knowledge, giving individuals **"greater autonomy of action."**

With all of these problems, Giddens suggests it may be difficult to regenerate community for three reasons:

1) Civil society as we've known it depends on a centralized state, which has been detraditionalized through devolution of power from the federal government to states and locales.
2) A renewed civil society under current conditions could be dangerous rather than emancipatory because of the risk of fundamentalism (for example, see Davidson, 1991).
3) While many see renewal of civil society as important to renewing democracy, there is a possible tension between democratization and civil society because of liberalism's abstract, universal rights for individuals do not facilitate community building.

The threatening conditions facing many rural schools and communities suggest the need to take chances in order to foster leadership aimed toward community and school sustainability. A return to root democratic principles that empowers citizens to work together enhances the likelihood of effective community agency that will strengthen both the school and the community.

Models for Democracy to Build School and Community Leadership

School leaders might want to consider moving away from the old-style top-down model of administration.

Giddens (1994:10-17) suggests a framework for reconstituting politics that also can be adapted to building leadership in rural schools and communities. This framework includes:

1) Reconciling individuals' autonomy and interdependence in various spheres of social life to enhance solidarity through "active trust" tied to personal and social responsibility.

2) Recognition of "life politics," which means that we recognize that individual and social struggles occur in a world that is now more subject to our decisions than being fixed by nature or tradition. We have increased social reflexivity, and schools can play an important role in developing it.
3) A "generative politics" that allows individuals and groups to "make things happen" instead of waiting for things to happen. The hope is that politics can more effectively approach problems of poverty and social exclusion, thus building "active trust" in the community.
4) "Dialogic democracy" that could open the way for solving problems in public arenas through broad-based discussion by various groups, rather than through an elite wielding power.

The linkages of these four concepts, according to Giddens (1994:127), are trust, obligation, and solidarity. Matthews (1999) adds the notion of teaching communities the process of deliberation. In this sense, conversations have two intertwining elements: Deliberation is defined as "meaning making," while dialogue is defined as "decision making." People need to understand why events are significant so they can decide how to act.

Lappe (1999) has the same goal in mind, but with a slightly different focus that she calls the 10 Arts of Democracy (Table 2).

Table 2: The 10 Arts of Democracy.

Active Listening	Public Dialogue
Creative Conflict	Public Judgment
Negotiating Interests	Evaluation and Reflection
Mediation	Celebration and Appreciation
Political Imagination	Mentoring

Source: Lappe, 1999

These principals suggest leadership characteristics, focusing mainly on two-way communications. Building leadership within communities that is based on democratic principles is crucial in helping to adapt to change and improve the quality of life. In fact, schools should be laboratories for democracy (Haas and Nachtigal, 1998; Wood, 1998; cf. Dewey, 1916).

The current emphasis on community engagement offers the positive possibility of more democratic participation in schools. As Cortes (1996:26) wrote:

> I believe that it is important to understand that "public engagement" is not mobilization around fears and frustrations. Nor is it another easily-applied formula for education reform. Meaningful community engagement is a long-term process requiring a patient investment of sustained effort. Rather than being included as just one part of a strategy to improve public education, community engagement should be at the center of the effort. It is not a question of bridging the gap between the "leadership" and the community: it's a matter of making the community the leadership in educational reform.

Schools, Leadership, and Sustainable Community Development

There are several ways for schools to develop leadership of youth and adults, including:

First, rural schools, as a central institution in rural life, have an important role to play in building leadership for community

development and sustainability. Haas and Nachtigal (1998) suggest students need to learn to live well, incorporating knowledge of the ecology, civic involvement, economics, sense of spiritual connection, and community living. Their core assumption is that schools are intended to serve the public and to help students live well in their communities; the function of schools is to pass knowledge across generations while building the community for the future.

Second, youth need to be involved in decision making from a young age because they are the future of the community (Gardner, 1995). Wood (1998), principal of Federal Hocking High School in southeastern Ohio, has transformed his school into a democracy where students make meaningful and significant decisions that help the school function.

There is evidence to suggest an imperative need for schools to involve youth in decision making in order to encourage leadership and civic participation. A nationwide study of American youth aged 15 to 24, completed in January, 1999, was commissioned by the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) (Branson, 1999). Among the key findings of the "New Millennium Project" were:

- "Young people today lack interest, trust, and knowledge about American politics, politicians, and public life generally." Since 18-year-olds were first given the right to vote in the 1972 elections, the voter turnout rate of 18- to 24-year-olds has steadily declined from 50% to 32% in 1996. Turnout among this age group in 1998 is projected to have been below 20%, perhaps the lowest in the nation's history.

- The highest youth priorities are personal and individualistic. Having a close-knit family (61% give it a 10, the highest importance rating), gaining knowledge and skills (60%), and becoming successful in a career (50%) are youth's three most important goals. In contrast, the lowest-rated youth priorities include being a good American who cares about the good of the country (27%), being involved in democracy and voting (26%), and being involved and helping your community be a better place (25%).
- Youth voluntarism is on the rise, but it is decidedly individualistic and apolitical. It is one-on-one social service most likely to take place in community institutions like soup kitchens, hospitals, homes for the elderly, and schools. This suggests that substituting "community service" for well-taught classes in civics and government will not achieve the goals of good civic education.
- Young people are highly critical of how school government and civics classes are taught. A majority (55%) agreed with the statement that schools do not give them information about how to register or even about the "mechanics of voting." More than a third of the survey respondents said that making American government classes more participatory would make young people a lot more likely to get involved in the community and in political activities.

Third, schools need to become the focal point of a "community of learners" that ideally includes all community members. The community

of learners is dedicated not only to lifelong learning, but also to fostering lifelong, shared leadership that is based on meaningful participation in activities that develop both the school and the community.

According to Branson, (1999) There is agreement that civic education should be:

- cross disciplinary
- participative
- interactive
- related to life
- conducted in a non-authoritarian environment
- cognizant of the challenges of social diversity, and

co-constructed with parents and the community (including nongovernment organizations).

Miller (1995) notes that the long-term benefits of school-community partnerships may include leadership development, renewed civic responsibility, and a revitalized sense of community. Stern (1994) suggests the need to redesign rural education in order to create opportunities for rural youth in their communities. She notes school curricula linked to community development have integrated students into community life in a significant way, thus changing their attitudes. These programs have helped students see that the community is a possible place to stay or return to after college.

We are proposing a model for rural schools that is, in many ways, an old model rooted in history, but it is particularly relevant in these times. In it, the school becomes an overt agent in community

economic development using, leadership development and civic education.

Figure 1 suggests that agencies, groups, and individuals at various levels in the community might work and act together for rural community development. The focus is on the school-community relationship. In the best of all possible worlds, the community is the locus of politics based on active trust, obligation, and solidarity for promoting community agency and sustainable development. It is here that citizens hold their deliberations and dialogue on important issues related to rural school and community sustainability.

Both the school and local government have the role of setting policies and fostering conditions that empower citizens to become community leaders. This is where communications becomes particularly important. Activities related to school and community improvement might be held in the spirit of the strategic planning process suggested for the Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community program (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994; see Appendix). To be successful, the process of school-community engagement must be inclusive, crossing class, racial, and ethnic lines (AEL, [forthcoming]).

Figure 1: A Model for School-Community Engagement Based on Principles of Democracy.

Goals: Community Agency, Solidarity, and Sustainability

Economic, Community Development

Democratic Principles

Dialogic Democracy
Shared Resources
Active Trust
Generative Politics

10 Arts of Politics

Active Listening	Public Dialogue
Creative Conflict	Public Judgment
Negotiating Interests	Evaluation, Reflection
Mediation	Celebration, Appreciation
Political Imagination	Mentoring

Local Government
- City/town
- County

Role of setting policies, fostering democracy, leadership, economy, using dialogue, deliberation

Empowered Citizens:
Reflexive
Autonomy and Obligations
Life Politics
- Parents
- Students
- Non-parents
- Business owners
- Non-government organizations

Community of Learners

Local School: Rural Development
- Curriculum of Place
  - Skills to Exceed Standards
  - Sense of Place
  - Community Knowledge
  - Community Service
  - Employment Alternatives
  - Leadership
  - Citizenship
  - Learn How to Learn

Technology

Some Concluding Thoughts

As we've already noted, there are historic roots for what we propose. As Dille (1920: 291-292) wrote:

> . . . [T]he country child has as much right as the city child to a training which will enable him to live in the world in which he finds himself and understand his share in it, and to get a good start in adapting himself to it. It is the business of every school to train its pupils to be successful as human beings and as American citizens. To do this it must take into account and make use of the conditions around it—the interests, the needs, and the occupations of the families of its pupils. This does not mean that our rural schools shall be a copy of the city schools, but that there shall be set up in every rural community a school which will base its work upon the life of the community and the needs of the community, so that its pupils shall receive the necessary training that will enable them to fit successfully into the life of the community.

Rural schools and communities will continue to face many challenges. If schools are willing to marshal their resources more effectively by building new leadership among youth and adults, there is a strong likelihood that the life of the community will be enhanced.

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Resources

Web Sites

Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education
http://crton.com/allpie/
This New York-based nonprofit organization promotes parental involvement in education at all levels. AllPIE's site contains membership information, a newsletter, a resource catalog of books and materials, and information on upcoming conferences and workshops.

Benton Foundation
http://www.benton.org/
Visitors to this site can learn more about two of the Foundation's projects, "Communications Policy and Practice" and "Kids Campaign," that provide citizens with information, research, and tools to understand the effective use of new communications and how to act on behalf of children in their neighborhoods.

Center for Civic Education
http://www.civiced.org/
This site offers curriculum materials, research information, articles, papers, and links to resources on civic education.

Communitarian Network
http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/
This site describes a coalition of individuals and organizations who have come together to shore up the moral, social, and political environment. The nonsectarian, nonpartisan, international association. believes that individual liberties depend upon the bolstering of the foundations of civil society: families, schools, and neighborhoods. It is through these institutions that we acquire a sense of our personal and civic responsibilities, an appreciation of our rights and the rights of others, and a commitment to the welfare of the community and its members.

Communities in Schools
http://cisnet.org/
Use a map to find local CIS sites and access CIS publications on this site.

CPN Study Circles Education Discussion Guide
http:www.cpn.org/SCRC/ed_com_short.html
Download "The Busy Citizen's Discussion Guide: Education in Our Communities," a workbook on initiating community dialogues, produced by the Study Circles Resource Center.

Education Commission of the States
http://www.ecs.org/ecs/ecsweb.nsf
To gather more information on education policy, access ECS, Information Clearinghouse, join an on-line discussion, or review ECS publications.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
http://www.ael.org/eric/index.htm
Located at AEL, Inc., ERIC/CRESS maintains a database of educational literature and produces publications, including books and 1500-word Digests that summarize important education research.

Foundation for Excellent Schools
http://www.fesnet.org/
The Foundation is dedicated to helping schools and communities build and strengthen the infrastructure for improvement.

Hand in Hand: Parents, Schools, Communities United for Kids
http://www.handinhand.org/
The Hand in Hand Initiative is a national campaign, sponsored by the Mattel Foundation and coordinated by the Institute for Educational Leadership, to foster family and community involvement in education. Visit this site for resources -- such as tips for parents and teachers -- and a newsletter and calendar of upcoming events.

The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.
http://www.iel.org/
Find out more about IEL's more than 20 programs and partnerships, including those in leadership development and engagement.

The Charles F. Kettering Foundation
http://www.kettering.org/
The Charles F. Kettering Foundation is a non-profit research foundation dedicated to researching the relationships between democracy and the public.

National Association of Partners in Education
http://napehq.org/
Learn about NAPE's 12-step process to develop a successful partnership, and read about NAPE publications and its newsletter.

National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education
http://www.ncpie.org/start.shtml
Review guidelines for schools and school districts to create effective family-school partnerships. Also find information on publications and upcoming conferences.

National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools
http://csas.jhu.edu/p2000/
Read an overview of the six types of parental involvement identified by Joyce Epstein and learn the ten steps to school-family-community partnerships. Also view answers to frequently asked questions, and learn more about joining the partnership.

The National Parent Teacher Association
http://www.pta.org/index/stm
Read about a variety of PTA programs that encourage parents to participate in their children's education.

Public Education Network
http://www.publiceducation.org/
Learn how to become a member of PEN, and review its Ten-Point Framework and Five Policy Areas.

The Rural School and Community Trust
http://www.ruralchallenge.org/
The mission of the Rural Trust, formerly the Annenberg Rural Challenge is to enlarge student learning and to improve community life by strengthening relationships between rural schools and communities and engaging students in community-based public work.

Appendix: Excerpts from EZ/EC Document

The Strategic Plan is the cornerstone of the application for Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Community designation. This plan should emerge from a bottom-up process and should be comprehensive in scope. The plan should be bold and innovative -- representing a creative approach to meet the needs of the nominated area in a way that builds on the assets of the area (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994:22).

The Federal government is reinventing the way it does business. We realize that all to often, communities have been put in the position of responding to the rigid dictates of various Federal programs and Washington-based planning. This application for Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities is different. The tables are being turned. Our goal is to provide you with the flexibility you need to plan more strategically through a community-driven process. All of our Federal agencies are prepared to respond cooperatively to each of you and to your plans for change (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994:4).

The Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community . . . program is a critical element of the Clinton/Gore Administration's community revitalization strategy. This program is the first step in rebuilding communities in America's poverty-stricken inner-cities and rural heartlands. It is designed to empower people and communities all across this nation by inspiring Americans to work together to create jobs and opportunity (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994:4).

The road to economic prosperity and economic development starts with broad participation by all segments of the community [including government, community, health and social service, environmental and religious groups, the private and nonprofit sectors, and schools]. . . . The residents, themselves, however, are the most important element of revitalization (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994:4).

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