

The Role of Rural Schools in Community Development: Policy Issues and Implications

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This article builds on 5 years of research and development, under the auspices of the Rural Education Program at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), designed to ensure community well-being by building strong rural community-school partnerships. Communitywide support for community-based learning opportunities for youth, which is the basis for this work, improves social capital and helps youth appreciate their rural communities. Successful community-based approaches such as Foxfire, stream ecology monitoring, and entrepreneurship have identified attributes for successful implementation. I conclude with policy implications for ensuring long-term sustainability.

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 (Miller, 1991; Israel, Coleman, & Ilvento, 1993; Nachtigal, Haas, Parker, & Brown, 1989; Spears, Combs, & Bailey, 1990). These efforts have been driven by numerous factors and trends affecting 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 transition from local manufacturing and resource-based industries to a multinational, global economy. Mining, fishing, 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 (Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Fuguitt, 1994).

Rural communities often reflect such valued norms as strong work ethics, concern for neighbors, low crime rates, environmental quality, and a community spirit that provides

fertile ground for revitalization. Students have played critical roles in assisting community development efforts, and schools have long played an active role in rural communities. However, educator and community conceptions have generally limited that role to textbook-driven learning opportunities inside the school.

I organize this article around four data sources that explore policy issues and implications related to expanding conceptions of the roles schools and youth can play in rural community growth and survival. I begin with a brief review of the extant literature on community development, especially in regard to the concept of social capital. This is followed by a review of field work conducted over the last 5 years that focused on building strong linkages between the school and community. I then draw on data from a symposium on community-based approaches to student learning. Finally, I present the lessons and policy implications drawn from the information presented.

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, failing to recognize the interdependent nature of these three dimensions (Wilkinson, 1986).

In the past, focusing on economic issues may have been all that was needed to keep rural communities viable. However, a more global economy and rapid urbanization of rural areas has been accompanied by a breakdown in community solidarity. Businesses have closed, the young and well educated are leaving for metropolitan areas, and many social services—including schools—have been consolidated as a cost-cutting measure (Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Bryant & Grady, 1990; Miller, 1991). These trends have led to high levels of unemployment and the deteriora-

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tion of rural economic, social, and environmental well being. Recent evidence suggests that if community development efforts are to have a chance to succeed, they need to address the importance of social capital, especially for the long-term maintenance of successful change efforts (Flora & Flora, 1993).

Coleman (1987) describes social capital as resources that are imbedded in the social structure of the family and community such as norms, social networks, and interpersonal relationships that contribute to a child's healthy development. Coleman's interest in social capital centers on the impact it has on children. His research suggests that changes in the family, such as both parents working, reduces the child's exposure to social interaction regarding social, academic, and personal matters. Thus, opportunities for the development of social capital are reduced. Moreover, Coleman believes there has been a corresponding erosion of social capital within the community as seen in the decline of adult participation in youth and community organizations.

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." Such traditions, he asserts, "are hallmarks of a successful region . . . these 'civic communities' value solidarity, civic participation, and integrity. And here democracy works" (p. 36). However, little of Putnam's work has directly focused on rural communities in the United States.

Unlike Coleman and Putnam, Flora and Flora (1993) directed their research on rural communities. They use the phrase Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure (ESI) to describe their view of social capital, which comprises three interrelated elements. First, "symbolic diversity" refers to a sense of inclusiveness, where the diverse elements of the community are viewed as valuable and necessary to successful community well being. Second, "resource mobilization" reflects a willingness to invest collectively and to use private capital locally. Finally, "quality of linkages" refers to the networks within and between communities that facilitate information flow and quality decision making.

Combining these three elements, Flora and Flora (1993) provide a foundation for building conceptual understanding of the strategic roles that 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 see themselves only as an educational resource for the community's youth. Ironically, the community has generally been viewed solely as a rev-

enue resource for sustaining operation of the schools. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) 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 believe that a promising direction for revitalization and survival rests with the social capital that can be developed by building and sustaining strong linkages between community and school (Hobbs, 1991; Miller, 1991; Monk & Haller, 1986; Nachtigal et al., 1989; Spears et al., 1990). Rural communities may have a head start in developing these linkages because schools have traditionally played a central role in the life of these communities. In addition to providing basic education, they often serve 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 revitalization goals (Spears et al., 1990; Stern, Stone, Hopkins, McMillion, & Crain, 1994; Versteeg, 1993).

Since 1990, the NWREL Rural Education Program has worked with three isolated, rural communities in a project called the Community-School Development Partnership. The communities—Tonasket (WA), Cottonwood (ID), and Broadus (MT)—and the Rural Education Program examined the school's role as a community development resource.

The project was designed to address rural community distress by focusing attention on building the social capital of the community. Rural and community development specialists at NWREL believed this could be accomplished by drawing on the inherent assets of the community, with special attention centered on building a partnership between the local school system, community organizations, groups,

and individuals (Miller, 1993a). 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. Although each pilot site produced positive changes, only Broadus has sustained system-wide change that has affected both the school and the community.

A second field-based project focused on documenting promising practices of school-to-work transition in isolated rural communities using a case-study approach. Three isolated rural schools were chosen because they demonstrated the benefits to be gained. One of these case studies was also a pilot site for the community-school development partnership. Broadus, the community development site, and the two school-to-work case study sites, Methow Valley (WA), and Saco (MT), exemplify how student and community needs converged through restructuring. These schools used community assets as resources to help youth acquire knowledge and skills required for work, and to become productive members of the community.

Collectively, data from these two projects demonstrate that, given the opportunities, rural schools can serve as resources for addressing community needs. Moreover, when youth play meaningful roles as active, contributing community members, they develop an appreciation for their rural roots and their community.

Building on the Strengths of Youth

Broadus, population 550, is about 85 miles from a town of 2,500. Saco serves a population of 250 and is 45 miles from a town of 2,500. The Methow Valley includes the towns of Winthrop and Twisp, which are about 7 miles apart with a combined population of roughly 1,300. The Methow Valley is 120 miles from the nearest town of 2,500.

In Broadus, students and adults worked together on a community revitalization project. Students participated in community-wide vision and goal setting, and served on task force groups where they helped write and implement community development plans. 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 another case, students 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, developed a wayside park, and worked with local businesses to develop a local area service directory (Miller, 1993b).

In Saco, students developed a community recreation center in a building on Main Street. Working with faculty advisors, students formed a community advisory committee, developed a governance structure, and wrote successful grants to remodel the building. Students used computer drafting programs to design plans for remodeling. Students also took correspondence courses in interior design and used the recreation center as a real-life opportunity to apply what they had learned. Community volunteers have taught students to hang and prepare sheetrock for painting, wire electrical fixtures, and install plumbing (Miller, 1995a).

In the north central Cascade Mountains of Washington, the Methow Valley 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 winter, students are dismissed for a half-day each week to participate in the project. The program is organized around four strands: (a) career/jobs skills; (b) leisure and recreational time activities; (c) informational classes; and (d) community service. In the spring, students participate in an intensive two-day experience that may range from firefighter training with the Forest Service to wilderness backpacking and survival.

Students benefit from their involvement in multiple ways as well. They learn valuable workplace competencies, gain opportunities to test their vocational and recreational interests, and develop meaningful relationships with 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.

Furthermore, the community benefits in multiple ways as well. Local businesses tap into a reliable employment pool. Active student involvement with local residents provides 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 on the overwhelming level of community involvement and support, the fact that all students in the high school participate, and the active student involvement in planning and choosing activities and classes. The program is in its 4th year and continues to grow (Miller, 1995b).

Broadus, Saco, and the Methow Valley represent successful efforts to overcome geographic isolation. By establishing collaborative relationships between the school and the community, students have been given the opportunity to engage in meaningful community-based learning. Students worked with adults and gained an increased appreciation of their communities while contributing to a sustainable future.

These three rural communities built linkages between the school and the community, which served 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 occur. 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 to the future of their communities. Although such examples of youth and school involvement in the community seem 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

Elsewhere, I identified three interrelated approaches that build strong linkages between schools and communities (Miller, 1991). Although these three approaches are not definitive, they do reflect learning opportunities and experiences that cross boundaries traditionally separating 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. School resources such as buildings, 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 1970s, 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. In this model, the school serves as a linking agent for the social service needs of rural youth and families (Stoops & Hull, 1993). Services may include health screening, day care, and dental treatment. In Saco, for example, the school district has been funded for a fiber-optic network linking three remote communities. The network will provide training for health professionals and fire departments. Moreover, it will network schools and communities, thus facilitating the sharing of resources (Miller, 1995a).

A second approach emphasizes sociological inquiry into the community. For example, students study the community by assessing needs, monitoring environmental and land-use patterns, and documenting local history through interviews and photo essays. Nachtigal has written extensively in this area (Nachtigal et al., 1989). He notes that when students study their community and are directly involved with local residents, it helps them value their com-

munity. The most comprehensive approach to "community as curriculum," in terms of sustained national use, 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, for example, 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 also establish a business to address those needs. Sher and DeLargy (as cited in Stern et al., 1994) 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 et al., 1994). Like Foxfire, it is a comprehensive program of curriculum, training, and support.

These three interrelated approaches provide a way to think about how schools and communities can work together for 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.

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. Three high school students and 25 adults representing successful community-based initiatives from the northwest, Georgia, South Dakota, and Colorado participated in the symposium. Adults ranged in age from early 30s to late 50s and were balanced between men and women.

A broad cross section of roles provided a rich mix of knowledge and experience. For example, there were teachers, a community development consultant, rural residents serving as project coordinators, a nationally recognized service-learning consultant, the director of REAL, a Foxfire coordinator, a community organizer, and a chair of a rural teacher education program. Each participant was chosen

based on reputation and documented success in at least one of six areas related to community-based learning: broad-based community involvement; community-based curriculum; community development; service learning; education-to-work; and school-based enterprise.

Over a 3-day period, participants worked in small groups on individual projects and the six areas relating to community-based learning. Detailed notes of presentations, discussions, and related information were kept and analyzed according to two questions: (a) What contributed to the success of these community-based projects? and (b) What recommendations are there for others considering community-based learning? For example, a group representing community-based curriculum conducted a panel presentation and discussion of three distinct projects in which individuals were involved: Foxfire in rural Idaho, coastal studies in Oregon, and a student-built recreation center in Montana. A second activity focused on building a consensus around goals and strategies that participants collectively believed would facilitate and support the kinds of change that leads toward successful community-based student learning.

Table 1 provides a summary of the attributes emerging from data analysis. These attributes, which are interrelated, have been ranked by how frequently they were found in the data. Nearly every program described by participants included these elements, but with variation in emphasis. For example, everyone felt students needed to be involved in all aspects of a project (Attribute 1). However, how and when to involve students varied widely depending on adult and institutional constraints. Those projects that empowered students to participate in all aspects of the program often were isolated efforts within a larger school system. In some cases, isolation appeared necessary to ensure the program's continuation because the curriculum strategies employed varied significantly from the mainstream program. A coastal studies program, for example, engaged students in problem identification, research, and reporting on community-based needs. Time spent in the community collecting data was not viewed favorably by many traditional, content-focused teachers.

In short, symposium participants stressed that all these attributes must receive attention. However, emphasis will vary depending on the local context, staffing, resources, and support.

Several issues repeatedly emerged. First, developing a support base in the community provides the necessary strong foundation upon which to build lasting community-based learning experiences. Second, 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). In Saco, for example, students designed and built a recreation center—an activity that involved working after school and

on weekends. Initial involvement and enthusiasm was high, but the demands of homework, sports, and chores taxed their willingness to put in the extra time. However, when recreational activities were linked to curriculum requirements and students were given time during the school day to work on the project, the center was completed successfully.

Third, long-term sustainability should be a primary aim. The success of any community-based approach to learning rests on whether a new and empowering partnership between the community and school has been developed. Such a partnership must have a meaningful impact on the lives of rural youth and adults over an extended period of time. Moreover, participants must acknowledge that the changes implied in building a community-school partnership, where students engage in community-based learning experiences, are essentially issues 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, community development activists create opportunities to explore ways that students and the school can 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.

Lessons for Students

Community development activities and other forms of community-based learning provide a substantive alternative whereby students can experience and develop many of the competencies required to be productive members of a community. Simultaneously, such opportunities can enrich and enliven school curriculum in ways that help students learn and use important life skills. Providing rural youth with opportunities to become active, responsible members of a community that works together helps them see rural communities as a positive choice among many places to live and work.

Lessons for Schools and Communities

Developing a grassroots support base among the diverse constituent groups in the community provides a strong foundation upon which to build lasting community-based learning experiences. A major gulf often exists between schools and their communities. Recognizing and crossing that gulf needs to be a major focus.

One strategy that works well is linking curriculum requirements to community development activities. Such links include supporting teachers by providing time and resources to develop connecting activities, recognizing teachers who incorporate community-based elements into their curriculum, and celebrating teacher and student successes on an ongoing basis. It is also important to recog-

Table 1
The Ten Most Frequently Mentioned Attributes Leading to Successful Community-Based Learning for Students

Rank	Attribute	Description
1	Involve and empower students in all aspects of program or project	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	Develop broad-based support for the change	Local residents are involved 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, local residents with historical roots, and advocates. The whole community needs to be informed for a support base to be developed.
3	Identify resources	Identify 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	Develop a common vision	Develop 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	Provide a structured process	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	Emphasize group process and team effort	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.
7	Develop 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 diverse resources that exist 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.

Table 1 Continued

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	Create 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 okay to take risks and there needs to be motivation and buy-in for the change.

nize the small wins—the capacity to work in small groups, find information, write grants, and assume leadership—during a community development process. These steps are critical to achieving product outcomes, such as a new park, a newsletter, or a tutoring program. Finally, one needs to continually be reminded that the common thread shared by schools and communities is their recognition of 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 to make something possible—a school board resolution to participate in a program of community service, for example. Policy can also function to prevent or disallow something, such as a school board policy that prohibits students from leaving the campus during school hours. Policy also can function to require something, as is the case with state policy that obligates all students to be covered by insurance when they are involved in school-sponsored activities. Murphy characterizes these three approaches as “may”, “may not”, and “must” (1995, p. 3).

Policy can also be defined as resources. Many policies contain provisions addressing personnel, insurance, facilities, or other resources necessary for implementing or operating a program. For example, a school board can adopt a resolution allowing 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 an improvement effort will be implemented and institutionalized or sustained over time. Policy also serves to legitimize and lend credibility to an effort.

Murphy (1995) suggests that policy serves five essential purposes: First, it helps institutionalize programs and, thus, improves the likelihood of long-term sustainability. Second, policy can assure resources to ensure that programs develop and expand. Third, by granting permission to act, policy makes it easier for programs to develop and grow.

Fourth, policy provides a legal basis upon which to generate resource support from the private sector. And fifth, policy lends credibility and legitimacy to programs. Several examples will help to illustrate how these five policy aims can contribute to the success and survival of community-based education projects.

In Broadus, a school board resolution and letters of support from local agencies and leaders were required to participate in the community development project. Taken together, these actions granted permission and expressed support for the community and schools to participate. Therefore, these endorsements provided a basis for requesting additional funding from other agencies, businesses, and organizations.

When the Methow Valley School District implemented its 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 3 years of implementation, the program has developed broad-based support and acceptance. When state funding ended prematurely, 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, when students sought support for creating a community recreation center, they worked closely with the superintendent and principal to develop support. Students formed parent and student advisory boards to help guide design and policy components of the program. 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 examples demonstrate the pivotal place policy plays in program development and sustainability. Moreover, policy is more likely to be implemented when there is a broad-base of community support.

Strategies for Developing Effective Policy Support

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 example of its use drawn from rural community-based program development efforts.

Capitalize on the effectiveness of youth as advocates and policymakers. Students and those affected by the program should be allowed to speak for themselves, describing why there should be policy supporting community-based learning.

EXAMPLE: In Broadus, students serving on a community development task force developed a plan for career shadowing. They presented their plans and how career shadowing would benefit both students and local businesses. As a result, board policy was written to grant permission for the project, including allocation of resources such as time, insurance, and travel.

Build coalitions. A single individual may have impact on program and policy development, but 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, a community council had been developed in order to implement a community development partnership between the community and the school district. The Community Council consisted of 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. The council was able to leverage resources from the state's economic development department for hiring a project coordinator.

Be patient and persistent. Change requires persistent, long-term commitment. According to Murphy, "It took five years (in Minnesota) 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 began informally discussing the need for a recreation cen-

ter for students and the community. In 1995, a youth-designed and developed center opened on the community's main street with a dance for the graduating class.

Educate public officials. The success 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. Officials should be invited to spend time with projects, students, teachers, and community advocates who have knowledge and experience. Seeing and hearing is usually more influential than reading.

EXAMPLE: In Cottonwood, a community-school development partnership was implemented. A recreation task force presented 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. Initially, there were some reservations regarding the use of school buildings and materials. However, once policymakers and the community saw how beneficial the program was, the school board adopted policies that made school resources available for future programs.

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. Existing priorities should be linked to new efforts, showing how the new effort can expand or extend current practices and create more return on the dollar.

EXAMPLE: In the Methow Valley, the school board allocated general fund money to support the Community as a Classroom program when the existing state grant ended. Proponents convinced the school board to allocate funding by demonstrating that the program provided career and job exploration opportunities not available elsewhere.

Cover all bases. All constituent groups who can influence the policy effort must be involved in, understand, and support the effort. At the very least, these key constituents most not oppose the efforts. Sometimes, not being included can lead to opposition to an idea that otherwise would have been supported. Key groups to consider in this regard are the teacher's association, administrators, parent and community groups, state agencies, and influential individuals.

EXAMPLE: In Tonasket, a task force for community-school relations sought local government support to buy a building and turn it into a community youth culture center. The task force formed a board of directors, wrote bylaws and obtained nonprofit status. The center is now in its 3rd year of operation.

Do your homework. Solid information and data are more effective than passionate appeals alone. Policymakers need to know in concrete and demonstrable terms why one's program should be granted policy status. However, "data" need not always be presented as statistics or numbers. Rather, data also can take more qualitative forms, such as those deriving from interviews and document analysis.

EXAMPLE: In Broadus, the community council organized and held a conference for the community on how external trends impact rural communities in Montana. State tourism and transportation specialists, a rural demographer, environmental groups, coal development advocates, and education-to-work specialists were invited, and more than 80 community residents participated in the conference. The conference was followed by a meeting designed to create a vision to guide the work of the 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 are provided meaningful opportunities to engage in community-based learning. By building the social capital of the school and youth, the community helps develop responsible citizens, and creates opportunities for tomorrow's leaders to emerge. However, it is unlikely that community-based program initiatives will last without the active support of community organizations, groups, individuals, and leaders. It also is critical to shore that support through policy development. Policy provides the basis upon which a program can sustain support over time. Successful programs, such as those in Broadus and the Methow Valley, have been sustained far beyond the formative stages by ensuring provisions in school district policy that grant them permission and resources to exist.

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