

Partnering with Families Living in Rural Areas

Rural communities are often rich in history and pride for their local schools. At the same time, rural schools often are isolated geographically and have fewer resources than other schools. Many times, families in rural areas do not earn as much income at their urban counterparts, may have lower education levels and experience poverty and high mobility.

Rural schools often face special challenges for getting families more involved. On the other hand, these schools have other factors that work in their favor. Schools in rural areas often serve as community centers where people gather for sporting events, celebrations or special programs. Teachers and administrators in small schools also may be able to give more personal attention to their students. For these reasons, unique strategies are needed to build effective partnerships with families and communities.

Sample Action Steps

The following strategies are compiled from the Rural School Administrators' Resources (2000) written by AEL, Inc.

- Promote the school as a location for meetings for community groups with common interests.
- Open the school library and computer facilities for public use.
- Use home visits to target hard-to-reach families.
- Involve active families as volunteers to reach out to other families in the community.
- Involve families in non-academic areas such as school sports programs, band, home economics, vocational agriculture and choir.
- Set up a community expo at the school for health and human service agencies, perhaps in conjunction with a school festival or parent-teacher night.
- Use athletic events to highlight local service organizations that promote academic achievement.
- Provide transportation to family activities.
- Use informal networks, such as phone trees to contact families.
- Communicate school news, not just through written newsletters and bulletins, but also through a phone hotline so that those with low literacy skills have equal access to information.
- Mail communications to families because some rural families may not have Internet or a telephone.
- Offer adult education opportunities at the school for the families of students and other families in the community.



Resources

Promising Practices

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) created an IDEA Book to identify and describe common barriers to effective family involvement in the education of children participating in the Title I program and successful local programs that improve family involvement and the performance of these children (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). The book's appendix describes 10 in-depth profiles of local family involvement programs. Schools were selected to represent strategies used by rural, suburban and urban schools.

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/FamInvolve/appa.html>

Rural School Administrators' Resources

The document, created by AEL, Inc., contains resources on five topics relevant to rural school administrators and teachers when assessing and engaging communities and families. Included are *Assessing Parent Involvement: A Checklist for Rural Schools*; *Community Asset Mapping*; *Community Engagement: An Inventory*; *Creating Safer Rural Schools: Involving the Community and Rural School Facilities Planning Process: A Checklist*.

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED448970&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED448970

Ethical Practices and Parental Participation in Rural Special Education

This article addresses the ethics of parental involvement in special education for rural parents. It provides specific recommendations for promoting parental involvement in rural special education contexts.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4052/is_200701/ai_n25500759

Parent Involvement 101: A Guide for Rural Educators

A practical guide for teachers and administrators including discussion about facilitators and barriers to parental involvement. Model programs for rural areas are reviewed.

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/> Keyword Search: *Parent Involvement 101 Guide for Rural Educators*

Web Sites

The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community Publications Database

<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/bibsearch.html>

The Center for Rural Education, U.S. Department of Education

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/freedom/local/rural/index.html>

Rural School and Community Trust

<http://www.ruraledu.org>

The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio <http://www.appalachianohio.org/>

Source

Maynard, S., Howley, A. (1997). *Parent and Community Involvement in Rural Schools*. Charleston WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED408143)