

Community Asset Mapping

Community asset mapping will help you define your community, determine what assets are available to help improve local education and quality of life, and help match needs and assets. The first step—defining a rural school community—requires planners to think beyond just the school district. You must also consider where people work, shop, go to church, and go to relax. Consider a reasonable area of daily travel and commerce by parents of school children. If you are dealing with an elementary school, where do those children attend high school and work after graduation? Asking these questions will help determine what your community looks like.

What Research Says

While the tradition of close relationships between rural schools and communities has deep roots,¹ the forces of economic globalization, school consolidation, and teacher and administrator professionalization divided schools from communities during much of the twentieth century.² In the past 15 to 20 years, though, there have been considerable efforts to reconnect schools and communities. At least three trends—global economic restructuring that has damaged rural communities, devolution of federal powers to states and communities, and systemic school reform—offer schools and communities opportunities to form new and renewed relationships.³ At the same time, the practice of community development has changed. Many community development practitioners no longer bring in experts from outside the community; rather, they come to communities and listen to what residents have to say. Instead of focusing solely on problems, practitioners now examine how community assets can be used to improve the quality of life.⁴

The decline of many rural areas suggests that schools and communities need to work together for their mutual survival. Schools can offer needed leadership⁵ and by sharing resources, schools and communities can meet the standards of school reform while meeting the needs of community members.⁶

The Importance of Assets

A description of your community includes assets and capabilities. The task is to build on community strengths by acknowledging, documenting, and reporting these assets. Consider weaknesses as opportunities for improvement, not obstacles to success.

Creating an Asset Map

A good way to approach this task is to create an asset map that shows the resources and supports within the community on which community-in-school and school-in-community programs may be built. This allows you to take a careful look at the school-community relationship. It will give hope as community members realize just how rich their asset base is and it may reveal niches where residents (including students) can start businesses, set up service organizations, and take other measures to build school and community capacity. The following three-step exercise is intended to help you locate your community's assets, map those assets, and begin to develop school-community relationships.

Step 1. Locate the community's assets.

- Define the community's geographic boundaries.
- Identify institutions, service organizations, and businesses.
- Identify citizens groups and associations in the community.
- Identify citizens with special talents, abilities, or capacities.
- Identify other stakeholders.

Step 2. Do a visual depiction of the assets.

- Use a current local map to locate resources in relationship to each other, to families, and to the school.
- Be sure to map service categories such as child care, tutoring, cultural and natural amenities, etc.
- Assemble a directory that includes descriptions of local services and a map of community resources.
- Use the map as a way to identify challenges and opportunities.
- Use the map to help direct activities once a need or goal is identified.

Step 3. Help develop relationships, partnerships, and collaboration.

- Set up a community expo at the school for businesses and agencies, perhaps in conjunction with a school festival or parent-teacher night.
- Use athletic events to highlight local service organizations that promote academic achievement.
- Make personal contact with community members to see if they are interested in becoming involved with each other and the school.
- Promote the school as a location for meetings of community groups with common interests.
- Open the school library and computer facilities to public use.

Presented here are three different ways to approach community asset mapping: (1) generate a community profile, (2) complete a Community Capacity Inventory, and (3) conduct a “Windshield Survey.”

Data Sources

Aids to asset mapping include these:

- telephone book Yellow Pages
- chamber of commerce directory
- map of your area
- statewide business council publication
- state economic development agency phone number or Web site
- U.S. Department of Commerce
 - R census data on the Web at <http://www.census.gov/>
 - R county-level economic analysis data on the Web at <http://www.bea.doc.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
 - R agriculture and rural statistics on the Web at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/>
- reference desk at a public or college library
- school system data
- county development authority data
- public and private social service agencies
- churches
- businesses
- other community agencies and organizations

Generate A Community Profile

Community profiles help identify local assets, resources, conditions, and activities and reveal gaps, barriers, or needs. In generating a profile, you'll need to do the following:

- Collect basic information about the community, such as population, nature of households, educational attainment, ethnic characteristics, and income levels.
- Collect current information on all or selected academic areas.
- Identify existing community resources that support learning in those areas.
- Review the school improvement plan.
- Prepare a profile of school and community partnerships designed to strengthen academic learning.
- List community resource agencies that work with the school or are potential partners.

Here are some suggestions that might help you describe existing school and community characteristics related to academic achievement:

- Describe academic programs in your school, using available test scores, grade distributions, course selection booklets, and class enrollments to make your points.
- Describe the kinds of community activities that already support academic achievement in your school.
- Define how community engagement might strengthen your existing school improvement plan.
- Describe the nature of existing school-community partnerships.

All of the information collected will be useful in defining the school community. Such a definition is crucial for understanding the school's relationship to various parts of the community, for determining potential partners, and for developing strategies to reach out to the various school stakeholders.

Community Profile

Population (U.S. Census) _____

Household Type and Presence and Age of Children (U.S. Census) _____

School Enrollment and Type of School (school records) _____

Educational Attainment (U.S. Census) _____

Industries (phone book, chamber of commerce) _____

Types of Businesses (phone book, chamber of commerce) _____

Occupations (U.S. Census, chamber of commerce) _____

Median Household Income (U.S. Census, state data center) _____

Civic Organizations (phone book, community contacts) _____

Churches/Religious Organizations (phone book, community contacts) _____

Education-related organizations (phone book, community contacts) _____

Social Service Agencies (phone book, state directory) _____

Technology Use in the Community (Chamber of Commerce, community contacts) _____

Recreation/Leisure Time (community contacts, various agencies) _____

Other _____

Define Your Community (geography, role groups, interests) _____

Complete a Community Capacity Inventory

It is important to view communities as a collection of assets and resources for educating children, rather than a collection of needs. Each community has a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. An inventory or a "map" of the community resources needs to be

developed. Once this map has been established, it can be beneficial for two different purposes: to determine areas of opportunity and need and to move to action once a need or goal is identified.

The inventory defines six different kinds of assets: individual, institutional, federal and state, organizational, physical, and cultural. Use the list below to help you draw up a list of these assets for your community. Then you can begin a discussion of how they can be used to bolster academic achievement and how the school can help build the community's assets. Many of the individuals and organizations listed below, as well as the physical assets, can be incorporated into curricular and extracurricular activities. Your community may have additional assets not mentioned here.

- *Individual Assets* -
(Skills, talents, and experiences of school and community members)

- *Institutional* -
Hospitals
Schools
Churches
Library
College or university
Police department
Fire department
Elderly care facilities
Mental health facility

- *Federal and State* -
Extension Service/4-H
U.S. Forest Service
Bureau of Land Management
Small Business Administration
Agricultural Credit
Rural Development Agency
Telecommunications Agency
School Service Center
State Education Agency
Natural Resources Department
Economic Development Department
Local Development District
Military facility

- *Organizational Assets* -
Newspaper
Radio and TV
Utilities
Small and large businesses
Home-based enterprises
Parks/recreation areas
Religious organizations
Cooperatives
Cable company
Business associations
Citizen groups

- *Physical Assets* -
Lakes, ponds
Vacant land
Industrial structures
Energy resources
Waste resources
Natural sites
Agriculture
Mining
Forest

- *Cultural Assets* -
Historic/Arts groups
Ethnic/Racial diversity/heritage
Crafts, other skills
Cultural organizations
Nonprofit groups

Conduct a “Windshield Survey”

Here's a tool for getting to know your school and community better: Do a “windshield survey.” Drive around various areas of your community and make notes of what you see. Take a

detailed area map with you to help with your note taking. This is a hunt for already known and “hidden” community assets. All of the time, you should be thinking about the school and its relationship to the community and the land it lies on. You might want to ask questions such as these:

- **Neighborhoods/people in the community**

1. How does the school district fit into the geographic area of the community?
2. How are settlements in the school community located in relationship to one another and in relationship to the school?
3. How are residents of the community spread across the land generally and in relationship to the school?
4. What are the patterns of residence based on race or ethnicity?
5. Do some areas seem poorer or richer than others?
6. Where are the churches? What are the denominations represented?
7. What types of social/service organizations are there in the community?

- **Land use**

1. Are there large pieces of land owned by government agencies or private companies?
2. Is there land that appears not to be in use?
3. Is the land flat, rolling, hilly, or mountainous?
4. Is the land bare, covered with grass, covered with trees, in crops, in pasture, etc.?
5. Is there evidence of mining, now or in the past?
6. Where are other facilities, such as social service agencies, churches, and libraries, located in relationship to the school?
7. Are there serviceable vacant buildings?
8. Are there unsafe vacant buildings?

- **Education/historical/cultural features**

1. What historic sites are there in the community?
2. Are there historic buildings or unusual architectural features?
3. Does the community have any resident artists, musicians, craftspeople, and the like?
4. What about museums?
5. Is there a higher education facility, such as a community college or college, nearby?
6. Are there private schools in the community?
7. What about vocational/job training facilities?
8. Are there any festivals/community-wide functions? Who sponsors them?

- **Natural features/recreation**

1. Are there natural or other places in the community that could be used for outdoor education?
2. What are the recreational amenities?

3. Is there potential for tourism?
4. Are there any unusual restaurants?
5. Are there after-school activities for students?

- **Government**

1. What federal offices are located in your community?
2. What state offices are located in your community?
3. Does your school community cover more than one local government jurisdiction?
4. Where are local government offices located?
5. What about law enforcement?
6. Are there service or internship opportunities available with government agencies?

- **Health/human services**

1. Is there a clinic or hospital in the community?
2. What about physicians' or dentists' offices?
3. Are there mental health/drug rehabilitation facilities?
4. Where are the facilities for occupational therapy?
5. What type of care is there for the elderly?
6. Are there organizations that help the poor and welfare recipients?
7. Is there a shelter for abused spouses, the homeless, etc.?
8. Are there organizations to help strengthen families?
9. Are there service or internship opportunities available with health/human service organizations?

- **Business/economy/employment**

1. Where are businesses located in relationship to the school?
2. What kinds of businesses are there? Remember to consider both profit and non-profit businesses.
3. What kinds of work/internship/service opportunities are there for students?
4. What kinds of businesses are missing?
5. What kinds of businesses could students start in the community that would fill an empty niche?
6. Are there opportunities to market agricultural products or crafts?
7. How could existing businesses be enlisted to help the school?
8. If there are relatively few businesses, where do people work?
9. Are there places where students could participate in voluntary activities?
10. What opportunities are there for entrepreneurship training?

- **Media**

1. Where are newspapers located in relationship to the community?
2. Where do radio and television service originate?
3. What other media are available?
4. Are there public access points/channels?

- **Technology**

1. Where are the points of public access to computers, the Internet, etc.?
2. Are there facilities where the public can be trained/mentored?
3. Is anyone already using the Internet for marketing and business?

- **Housing**

1. How old are the houses?
2. What is the condition of housing in different areas?
3. Are there agencies to rebuild/restore housing stock?
4. Where is new housing being built?

- **Transportation**

1. What is the condition of roads and bridges?
2. How difficult is it to drive a school bus on the roads?
3. What types of traffic hazards are there?
4. How hard is it to get to school or work from certain places?

As an alternative exercise, put yourselves in the shoes of students. Hop on a school bus and follow the daily route, stopping at all of the stops. Consider asking the questions suggested above along the way. Consider some other questions: How long does it take to get from one end of the route to the other? Does the distance from the school pose problems for students who must ride the route every school day? Does distance from the school have anything to do with getting and keeping people from the community involved in the school?

Another idea: Take along some people from the community who have expertise and who can help give richer information for your windshield tour. These might include the school superintendent, a county extension agent, a social worker, a law enforcement officer, a member of the clergy, a community activist, a highway engineer, or a county official. Let them tell you about different areas of the county, who lives there, and the types of problems these residents encounter in their daily lives.

Other Resources

Cooperative Extension Service, local county agent

Land Grant Universities (Colleges of Agriculture) can offer assistance in doing asset mapping.

Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

The institute has several relevant on-line publications that can be downloaded at
<http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/publications>

John P. Kretzman & John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, 1993. Order from Acta Publications, 4848 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640. Phone: 800-397-2282 or 773-271-1030.

Notes

1. T. N. Carver, "The Organization of a Rural Community," in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture*, 1914 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1915), 89-138; Alvin Dille, "The Reorganization of the Country School," in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture*, 1919 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1920), 289-306; and Bruce Miller, *The Role of Rural Schools in Rural Community Development*. ERIC Digest EDO-RC-95-3 (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1995).
2. Jim Fanning, *Rural School Consolidation and Student Learning*, ERIC Digest EDO-RC-95-4 (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1995); Jonathon P. Sher, & Rachel B. Tompkins, "Economic Efficiency and Equality: The Myths of Rural School Economy and District Consolidation" in *Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of the Conventional Wisdom* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 43-77; and Timothy Collins, *Crucial Policy Links: Rural School Reform, Community Development, and Citizen Empowerment*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, Chicago, IL, August 4-8, 1999.
3. See note 2 above (Timothy Collins, *Crucial Policy Links: Rural School Reform, Community Development, and Citizen Empowerment*, 1999).
4. John P. Kretzman & John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993).
5. American Association of School Administrators, *Conservation Education in American Schools: Twenty-ninth Yearbook*. (Washington, DC: American Association of School Administrators, 1951).
6. See note 3 above.