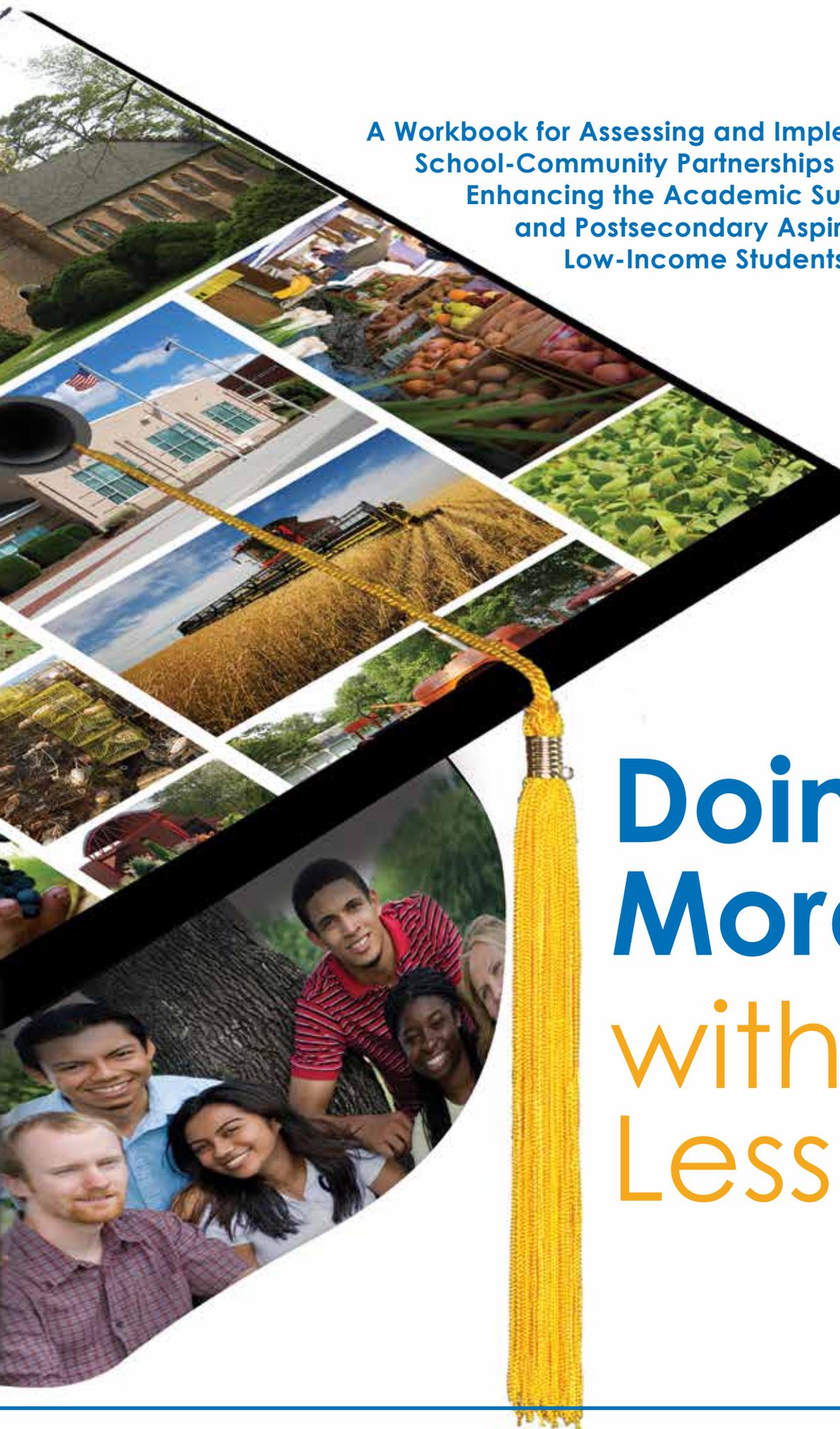


A Workbook for Assessing and Implementing  
School-Community Partnerships Aimed at  
Enhancing the Academic Success  
and Postsecondary Aspirations of  
Low-Income Students



# Doing More with Less

# Doing More with Less:

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## **A **Workbook** for Assessing and Implementing School-Community Partnerships Aimed at Enhancing the Academic Success and Postsecondary Aspirations of Low-Income Students**

The State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), with support from the federal College Access Challenge Grant Program, commissioned research to identify behaviors, structures, and perspectives that characterized successful school-community partnerships that positively impacted student achievement in six rural Virginia school districts.

This workbook, created as a supplement to *Doing More with Less: The Role of School-Community Partnerships in the Academic Success and Postsecondary Aspirations of Low-Income Students in Small Rural Schools in Virginia*,\* is designed to help rural Virginians thoughtfully assess school-community partnerships and consider how new and existing partnerships can enhance the academic success and postsecondary aspirations of students, particularly those from low-income families. Though the workbook is written primarily for school personnel in rural areas, stakeholders in any community could gain insight from conducting a partnership inventory and developing school-community partnerships that benefit students.

\* For more information or to read the full *Doing More with Less* report, visit [www.schev.edu/DoingMoreWithLess.pdf](http://www.schev.edu/DoingMoreWithLess.pdf).



## Rural Virginia

From the Appalachian coal fields to the bays of the Eastern Shore, rural communities make up more than half of Virginia's landscape as defined by the Office of Management and Budget and the Economic Research Service Rural-Urban Commuting Areas. Rural schools serve almost a quarter of the Commonwealth's students. However, these students graduate at rates well below the average on-time rate (73.2% of rural students as compared with 86.6% across Virginia).

State economic shifts and the loss of traditional local industries have left rural Virginians with fewer employment opportunities. Such geographic and economic challenges have, in some cases, negatively affected family and community life.

However, the *Doing More with Less* study found positive effects in areas where rural K-12 educators' work is supplemented by community organizations and individuals, both in and out of the school setting. Such support, referred to as school-community partnerships, was found to be vital to the success of small rural schools' efforts to promote academic achievement and college aspirations, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds.

Recognizing the impact of such community support, the report recommends conducting a **school-community partnership inventory**. Here's how you can get started.

**Getting Started:** Identify a group of stakeholders who are interested in supporting the success of students and are willing to help conduct a school-community partnership inventory.

A stakeholder group could include teachers, counselors, or other school personnel, as well as business, non-profit, and/or civic leaders. (This could be a great opportunity to include citizens who have expressed an interest in school affairs.) Ideally, the group membership would include people who are generally familiar with existing partnership programs and students' needs, but who can present new ideas to stimulate student growth. Group members should begin by having a common understanding of what community partnerships are and how they support schools.



You will see the cardinal icon throughout the workbook as a reminder to share your progress and inventory findings with interested stakeholders in your community and beyond.



## What is a School-Community Partnership?

School-community partnerships in rural Virginia can be understood through four descriptive lenses:

1. **Types of Partners**
2. **Types of Activities**
3. **Types of Involvement**
4. **Type of Focus**

Each lens is discussed in more detail below. For complete descriptions, please refer to the full report at [www.schev.edu/DoingMoreWithLess.pdf](http://www.schev.edu/DoingMoreWithLess.pdf).

**Types of Partners** - Classified by the primary organizational purpose of the partnering group or institution:

1. College access provider organizations
2. Business and industry
3. Non-profit organizations
4. Public agencies and organizations
5. Faith-based institutions and groups
6. Higher education institutions
7. Individuals without affiliation or acting outside of affiliations

**Types of Activities** - Grouped by services and activities of partners:

1. College knowledge (information about forms, applications, aid, admissions, etc.)
2. College aspirations (desire to attend postsecondary education, meet requirements, and overcome obstacles)
3. Career interest (desire to learn about and prepare for employment opportunities)
4. Academic interest (curiosity and desire to learn and excel academically)
5. Academic skills (abilities that allow success in a formal educational environment)
6. Life skills (knowledge, skills, and abilities such as time management, financial management, and task completion)
7. Basic necessities (needs such as clothing, shelter, food, and other staples)

**Types of Involvement** - Describes the nature of the relationship between the school and its partner(s):

1. Peripheral  $\longleftrightarrow$  Central
2. Simple relationship  $\longleftrightarrow$  Complex relationship
3. Short-term  $\longleftrightarrow$  Long-term
4. Single event  $\longleftrightarrow$  Frequent events
5. Indirect aid  $\longleftrightarrow$  Direct aid

**Type of Focus** - Describes the partnership's target audience:

1. Student-centered (financial aid, school supplies, scholarships)
2. Family-centered (social services, family counseling, basic necessities, transportation)
3. School-centered (classroom resources, educational programs, volunteering)
4. Community-centered (community service projects, student exhibits and performances)



#Lenses  
#2020Vision

Each partnership can be classified using these four sets of elements in a chart similar to the one below to provide a framework for analyzing the type and function of partnerships. A full-size version of this chart is available on page 11 in the back of this workbook to help you create an inventory of current and desired school-community partnerships.

### School-Community Partnership Inventory Names and Functions Form

Community Partners	College Knowledge	College Aspirations	Career Interest	Academic Interest	Academic Skills	Life Skills	Basic Necessities	Type of Focus
ABC Public University	✓	✓		✓	✓			1
DEF Social Service Agency							✓	2
GHI Non-Profit Educational Foundation		✓	✓					1,3
JKL College Access Provider	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			1, 2, 4
MNO Faith-based Organization		✓				✓	✓	1, 2



Tear out and use the chart on page 11 to complete your partnership inventory.



## Step 1: Identify current partners.

Use the School-Community Partnership Inventory form at the back of the workbook to list all organizations that currently provide services or programs for students. To help you identify the organizations with which your school might partner, we've included the following list of community partners found in the six rural case study districts outlined in the *Doing More with Less* report.

### Identified Community Partners in the Six Case Study Districts

#### College Access Partnerships

GEAR UP  
Career Coach  
Talent Search  
Provider A\*  
Provider B\*  
Virginia Association of Student  
Financial Aid Administrators (VASFAA)  
Upward Bound  
Provider C\*

#### Business Partnerships

Energy suppliers  
Financial institutions  
Industries  
Retail and service businesses  
Agriculture and resource gathering outfits  
Business and industry associations  
Doctors, lawyers, other professionals

#### Non-Profit Partnerships

Community education foundations  
NAACP  
Rotary Club  
Lions Club  
Men's organizations\*  
Arts organizations  
Women's Club  
Ruritan Club  
Garden Club  
Youth sports  
Fraternities/Sororities  
Historical societies  
Lunch Buddies  
Father's organizations\*  
Farm Bureau  
Kiwanis Club  
American Legion

(Non-Profit continued)

Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Chamber of Commerce  
Community action agency  
Mental health agency  
Literacy agency\*  
Employment assistance agency\*

#### Faith-Based Partnerships

Churches  
Ministerial associations  
Religious education clubs\*  
Religious youth organizations

#### Public Partnerships

Police/Fire departments  
Mental health organizations  
4-H/County Extension Office  
State Parks/Fisheries/Game offices  
Youth services office\*  
Community recreation  
Social Services  
Head Start  
Americorps  
Resource center for parents

#### Higher Education Partnerships

Technical institutes  
Community colleges  
Four-year institutions  
School volunteers  
Athletic booster club  
Band booster club  
Parent organizations: High school  
Parent organizations: Elementary  
In-school volunteer programs  
Alumni associations  
Informal support systems



#HowdyPartner

## Step 2: Identify the service(s) provided by partnering organizations.

The first seven headings in the top row of the chart on page 11 represent the types of activities that community organizations can provide to support students' college and career readiness. Check off the function(s) each partner currently provides. The detailed explanations below can help you determine which category best encompasses the organization's service(s) and support:

1. **College Knowledge:** To successfully navigate college preparation and entry, students and their families must learn and understand information about application and financial aid forms and processes, college affordability, and college opportunities, among other details. College knowledge is developed through straightforward information delivery and through socialization to college-going through familial and peer relationships where college attendance is valued and discussed.
2. **College Aspirations:** Aspirations provide the motivation to take on and succeed in more difficult coursework in high school and to pursue co-curricular opportunities that will make students more attractive college candidates. Aspirations are built through firsthand experiences with higher education coursework and through exposure to realistic views of college life, through the encouragement of peers and trusted adults, and through academic success and recognition.
3. **Career Interest:** Like college aspirations, career interest is essentially the desire to learn about and pursue possible vocational opportunities, whether they require postsecondary education or not. Career interest arises from firsthand experiences that allow a student to envision him- or herself in that role, and through understanding and creating a plan to accomplish the requisite academic or technical preparation necessary.





#GotSkills

4. **Academic Interest:** This category addresses a student's general interest in learning and academic success that is a prerequisite for college preparation and scholastic achievement. Academic interest is similar to college aspirations and career interest in that it is an intangible will or desire to persevere as a learner. However, academic interest is more specifically a matter of the enjoyment and relish of taking in new information, making connections between aspects of learning, and applying learning to new situations. Academic interest is gained from diverse positive learning experiences that occur both inside and outside the school setting.
5. **Academic Skills:** Academic skills are fundamental abilities that allow a student to work within the structures of formal education and succeed in that environment. At their most basic, these skills include the ability to listen, to hear and follow instructions, and to focus on a task. More advanced skills include the ability to memorize facts, to understand the role of context, to use information to solve problems, to summarize information in one's own words, and to synthesize, compare, and contrast multiple pieces of information. Academic skills are learned through academic experience, as well as through intentional activities and hands-on experiences.
6. **Life Skills:** Of the deficits faced by students from low-income families, life skills are the most easily overlooked since they are not as pressing as basic needs, and not part of formal assessment like academic skills. Life skills include social skills, money management, conflict resolution, task persistence, self control, and other behaviors. Life skills are important for success in all aspects of life, including relationships, education, and career. These abilities are mastered through both observation and practice.
7. **Basic Necessities:** Basic necessities are life essentials that, when insufficiently met, make all other tasks more difficult. These include having adequate sustenance, housing, clothing, and other personal needs. This category might also include social and emotional care and support. These needs are met through direct aid and through healthy relationships.

### Step 3: Consider the effectiveness of existing school-community partnerships.

Your list of community partners is most meaningful if the partnerships are effective. Discuss with your group members each partnership on your list, and put a star next to the strong, effective relationships. As a group, review the partnerships that are not starred and brainstorm ways to make them more effective and meaningful. Be sure to write down any action items on the back of your inventory.

To assist you in determining and increasing the effectiveness of your partnerships, use the lists below (from *Doing More with Less*), which identify several features that impact the coordination of resources and programming.

#### **Effective school-community partnerships in rural Virginia communities occur when:**

1. All involved parties contribute from their unique resources and benefit from the resources shared by others. In rural areas, financial and human resources can be scarce. Combining resources can result in more meaningful and efficient program delivery.
2. Partners capitalize on local resources to engage students in new learning opportunities. For example, new learning experiences created in conjunction with historic sites, state parks, and theatrical and musical performance venues can engage students who struggle in traditional learning settings.
3. Services and activities provide students with new venues outside the classroom where they can build self-efficacy and demonstrate ability.
4. Coordinators bring vision, motivation, and unique skills to their work, rather than relying on stock or pre-existing programs. This finding highlights the importance of good hiring practices and a healthy balance of structured expectations with the freedom to adapt to local circumstances.
5. Partnerships are sensitive and responsive to teacher and school needs. Whether through volunteer programs that allow teachers to use adults where they are most needed, or organizations that develop class sessions that reinforce SOL objectives, the best partnerships allow school personnel to communicate what resources are most needed and how they can be best used.
6. Partners' services and activities meet short-term and long-term objectives, often simultaneously.



#Collaborate  
DontDuplicate

## ***Ineffective school-community partnerships in rural Virginia communities occur when:***

1. Partnerships are not initiated or supported. This may occur because of participation limitations due to transportation issues, difficulty attracting volunteers, and the often long commute times endured by parents who live in rural areas.
2. Facilitators have not taken time to build relationships and demonstrate commitment to the community, school, and students. On some occasions, potential partnerships with organizations from outside the local area may not materialize due to concerns over intentions and control.
3. Services are not coordinated, partnerships develop a myopic perspective, or facilitators fail to take steps necessary to connect with other partners and develop collaborative relationships.

Remember to note on your inventory form action steps that you can take to renew or establish successful partnerships. Consider the following:

- Assess whether other organizations are doing similar work in the community and if there are opportunities to collaborate with them.
- Change the time or date of meetings so more people can participate.
- Relieve the pressure to act quickly to produce tangible outcomes from partnerships. It can take awhile to establish trusted partnerships that will benefit students.



The Virginia Foundation for Community College Education (VFCCE) has launched the Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative to increase educational attainment in Virginia's rural regions, spanning the middle peninsula, southwest, and the Shenandoah Valley. Find out more at [www.vccs.edu/giving/rural-horseshoe-initiative/](http://www.vccs.edu/giving/rural-horseshoe-initiative/).

# Step 4: Review your inventory and determine whether you have unmet student needs.

If you find that **current** partnerships are not meeting students’ needs, consider whether you can expand existing relationships to help meet these needs. If not, work as a group to identify new partnering organizations that could provide services or resources to fill the void. Draw a line on your inventory and list **potential** partners and services.

To help you brainstorm how best to meet students’ needs, as well as organizations that could potentially provide these functions, take a look at the following list of services and activities by partner category. Please also reference the inside back cover of the workbook for examples of successful school-community partnerships from rural Virginia case study districts. Do any of these organizations exist in your community? What additional services could they provide to benefit students? How can you make sure all student needs are met?

## Typical Partnership Services and Activities by Partner Category

<p><b>College Access Providers</b>          Application/FAFSA/Financial aid assistance          College visits/tours          General cultural events          Academic tutoring          College and career advising          College entry information          Academic accountability          Scholarship information          Loan information          Scholarship dispersal          Parental programs/information          Access support for underserved populations          SAT/ACT test preparation</p> <p><b>Business and Industry</b>          Presentations about career options          Mock interviews          Reality store/simulations          School supply donations          Grants/scholarships          Educational resources/instruction          Job Fairs          Loan/donate equipment          Educational initiatives</p> <p><b>Non-profit (Excl. faith-based)</b>          Scholarships          Recognition events          Community advocacy and activism          Service opportunities</p>	<p>Mentoring          Tutoring          Cultural opportunities          Educational programs, seminars, etc.          Mental health services and education          Physical/wellness education          Employment counseling, prep, etc.          Special interest or life skills development          Sports and athletics leagues/training/funding          Performance-based contests (writing, etc.)          Educational skill development (literacy, etc.)          Parental programs/support/socialization</p> <p><b>Faith-based</b>          Food for needy students          Support for teachers          Meals for sports teams          Student tutoring/mentoring          Religious education opportunities          Tutoring          Special events (graduation, etc.)          Summer events          Positive youth socialization          GED program recruitment/hosting          School supply donations          Information conduit to population</p>	<p>Site for school outreach meetings          Socialization to value of education          Academic accountability and reinforcement          Scholarships</p> <p><b>Public Agency</b>          Public safety education (fire dept., etc.)          Mental health services and education          Educational programs (in school)          Educational programs (out of school)          Cultural education/socialization          Positive youth socialization          Life skills development          Mentoring          Tutoring          Transportation to/from events          Life Skills programs          Services coordination          Parental education/socialization          Job prep/training/location services          College and career advising          College socialization          Family support/counseling          College visits/tours          School supply donations          Sports/recreation opportunities          Academic socialization          Physical health services</p>
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## Step 5: Make a plan to approach existing and potential partners.

Here's where the hard work begins. Now that you've identified ways that new or current partners can help meet student needs, talk with school leaders, colleagues, and other stakeholders and create a plan to approach these organizations to request a partnership or suggest new functions. To help make your requests successful, listed below are five tips for approaching organizations and maintaining partnerships.

### *Tips for Approaching and Keeping New and Potential Partners*



1. Do your homework before approaching a potential partner. Know what the organization does and who the decision-makers are within the organization. A potential partner will be more likely to work with you if your request is addressed to the correct person and shows that you understand the organization's purpose and strengths.
2. Put your request in writing. Whether it's via a letter or by email, providing a written request will give you a chance to clearly communicate your needs and explain exactly how the potential partner can help you meet your goals.
3. Communicate how the partnership would be mutually beneficial. You should be able to explain to a potential partner why this relationship would be of value not only to your students, but also to the organization. Every organization, including non-profits, can benefit from good public relations opportunities and community exposure.
4. Designate a contact person. Just as you should be given the name and contact information of your liaison at the partnering organization, they should know exactly who to call if they have questions or suggestions. Having the ability to directly contact the correct individual ensures that the partnering organization doesn't reach someone who has no knowledge of the partnership or can't provide details about a program or event.
5. Keep your partner informed and updated even after joint events are over. Organizations will be more invested if you can share with them how the event or program made a difference for participating students. Such communications could be broad (such as a webpage or social media posting) or specific (such as personal letter from a participating student).

School-community partnerships are of paramount importance for rural schools doing more with less, but be sure to choose your partners wisely. Remember it is the quality, not quantity, of partnerships that will benefit students. Once you have strong partnerships in place, nurture them by remaining in contact with partnering organizations and holding annual planning meetings during which mutual goals can be discussed and modified.



**Record action plan to nurture both new and existing partnerships from Steps 2 and 5:**

**NOTES**

## School-Community Partnership Examples from Rural Virginia Case Study Districts

Below is a list of ways in which rural Virginia school districts have collaborated with community partners to create services and programs that benefit students and their families.

- Write mini-grant requests to community education foundations or other local partners or businesses for specific resources that would improve the delivery of course materials. For example, a teacher could request funds to make sturdy math flashcards that could be reused by subsequent classes.
- Coordinate a “Reality Store” program in which students compare the average wage from a career to the actual cost of services, goods, transportation, taxes, education, and raising children. In one Virginia school district, the Career Coach collaborated with the 4-H coordinator to have 6th- through 9th-grade students complete an online career interest inventory; students used their results as the basis for their “reality” experience.
- Host a Super Saturday event, partnering with higher education institutions, associations, or other school districts, to help families understand and complete the FAFSA.
- Ask civic organizations, such as the Rotary Club, to sponsor trips to regional writing or speech contests, science exhibitions, leadership training, etc.
- Work with higher education institutions to plan on-campus overnight visits for individuals or small groups.
- Work with state or local agencies to develop a freshman seminar course that exposes 9th graders to career planning and basic life skills, such as financial management.
- Offer students opportunities to visit nearby cities, parks, historical sites, museums, and other guided cultural experiences. Organizations with a consistent presence within the school (such as access organizations, 4-H, community education foundations, and others) could provide financial or logistical assistance.
- Have local businesses sponsor traveling exhibitions, speakers, or performance groups (music, theater, and others) to come to the area.
- Invite recent college graduates or successful alumni to return to school to talk about their experiences and encourage current students to consider college options. Ask local professionals, business owners, and other community leaders to discuss not only the details of their careers, but to explain the steps they took to reach their current positions.
- Welcome community members into the school by opening the computer lab, gymnasium, or library during the evening. Invite residents to tour new buildings or to have lunch in the cafeteria with staff and students.
- Combine school and county maintenance facilities and staff to cut costs.
- Share the cost of a van with local non-profits, such as the Boy Scouts or 4-H, creating the means for each organization to offer rides to and from events that otherwise might not have been accessible to students with transportation issues.
- Solicit the donation of goods and services from local businesses to use as door prizes to entice participation in parenting skills classes or other important information sessions.
- Work with nearby state parks to develop programs that provide hands-on lessons in field biology, conservation, wildlife management, or other areas of interest.
- Continue to involve prominent alumni in school activities by asking them to speak at commencement exercises or attend fundraising dinners that support scholarships or educational initiatives.



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