



LEARNING WITH PUBLIC PURPOSE

Rural America is at a crossroads. Dying traditional economies and demographic shifts are introducing new realities into once familiar settings. At the same time, rural schools are being called upon to improve education quality for an increasingly diverse population, often with woefully inadequate resources. The time is right for a bold strategy that simultaneously addresses the interrelated challenges of community renewal and school improvement.

Learning with Public Purpose (LPP) is the Rural Trust's answer to simultaneously improving rural schools and communities in this environment. When student learning contributes to the larger public purposes of the community, young people develop the habits of citizenship and service while also deepening their understanding of knowledge in core subjects. The community reaps the benefits of what young people can accomplish when they are engaged, challenged, and valued as citizens of their place.

Examples of LPP programs include:

- ◆ **Community Development-Oriented Service Learning (CDOSL)** - Connects student learning and service to community development priorities.
- ◆ **Student Civic Activism** - Engages young people in civic action projects that have policy implications and require interaction with local and regional policymakers.

Project Goals

Our goal is to develop teacher and community fellows who collaborate to design and implement learning experiences that are academically rigorous and address important community issues. We will engage local colleges and universities to support these fellows by integrating CDOSL methodology into teacher preparation and providing professional development programs for experienced teachers.

Project Activities

We will accomplish this goal through partnerships with school districts in Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, and Tennessee by:

Capacity Building Office:
1775 Graham Ave., Suite 204
Henderson, NC 27536
(252) 433-8844

National Office:
1530 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 240
Arlington, VA 22209
(703) 243-1487

- ◆ Engaging K-12 teachers, preferably in the first five years of their careers, and community partners in a year-long professional development and training fellowship program that includes local workshops, a regional academy, and a summer institute.
- ◆ Providing experienced coaches to give on-site and electronic support in the areas of teaching practice, curriculum development and alignment with local and state standards, and school-community connections.
- ◆ Linking fellows and technical assistance providers through a moderated listserv.
- ◆ Implementing the Rural Trust's Portfolio-Based Assessment System, documenting the multiple outcomes, and celebrating the successes in participating communities.
- ◆ Sharing performance measures and promising practices with policymakers and key opinion leaders and practitioners around the country.

Project Outcomes

We anticipate results in each of the three areas addressed by the assessment system:

- ◆ Student learning and contributions to community growth.
- ◆ Community empowerment and contributions to student learning.
- ◆ Depth and spread of community development oriented service learning.

Specifically, we anticipate:

- ◆ Increased academic achievement and civic engagement among participating students.
- ◆ School and district level modifications that align LPP initiatives with state and local standards and make use of the process as a school-wide improvement strategy.
- ◆ Measurable changes in the community that can be attributed to student work.
- ◆ Increased recognition and engagement of young people as critical resources for community renewal.
- ◆ Increased collaboration between educators and community developers.
- ◆ Increased capacity of a cadre of educators, youths, and community leaders to provide LPP instructional leadership in their schools and to facilitate school-community connections beyond the life of the project.

Conclusion

School improvement and community development require clear purpose, patience, and persistence. Merging the cultures of these two worlds requires the same. It is not easy work, but it is crucial to the vitality and sustainability of rural places and the improvement of education for rural children. Our schools must do more than prepare young people to leave the community and our communities must take on more active roles in the schooling of our children. Together they must make our communities better places in which to live, work, learn, and play.

For more information, contact:

julie.bartsch@ruraledu.org in the Northeast

daisy.slan@ruraledu.org in the Deep South

margaret.maclean@ruraledu.org in Appalachia

doris.williams@ruraledu.org for all other locations