
**Summary of the Official Proceedings
Wisconsin Rural Policy Network Forum**

**Sponsored by the State Superintendent,
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
In partnership with Learning Point Associates**

**Held at the Plaza Hotel and Suites, Wausau, Wisconsin
January 29-30, 2004**

Report Issued: March 10, 2004

Note: This report summarizes the results of the forum. The State Superintendent will be issuing a follow-up report – with an action agenda – in the near future.

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Introduction and Background

Using funding provided by Learning Point Associates, Wisconsin State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster convened a special policy network forum involving over 100 delegates from rural Wisconsin schools and communities. The policy forum was held in Wausau, Wisconsin on January 29-30, 2004.

The agenda and the list of participants for the two-day session are provided as appendices (see pp. 22 and 25, respectively).

Part One

Overview Assessment – Strengths and Challenges Rural Schools, Communities, Economics, and Leaders

Note: This is a restatement of the ideas that were gathered from the small groups. The statements were grouped into subheadings to make it easier to see the scope of the assessment that was conducted at the policy network forum.

Strengths of Rural Schools

1. **Teachers.** Teachers in rural schools tend to be very visible members of the community they serve. Rural teachers are key members of the community and they know the students and their families. Low turn-over rates ensure continuity among teachers.
2. **Class Size.** Class sizes tend to be smaller, so teachers are able to have a one-on-one relationship with their students; this allows special needs to be recognized and addressed. Smaller class sizes also provide expanded opportunities for student participation, involvement and success.
3. **Organization.** Rural schools have a flatter organizational structure with fewer layers and are able to adjust or adapt rather quickly. Communication can take place rapidly. These schools also often use creative approaches to education, including class structure and other school-related activities. The curriculum can be adjusted rapidly.
4. **Leadership.** Members of rural school boards tend to have strong historical ties to the people and the institutions within the community. There is accountability to the public and a value is placed on having the administrators be very accessible by the community.
5. **Partnerships.** Schools tend to use technology and have strong business partnerships and cooperative programs with industry. Distance education is used to expand the choices available in rural schools. Smaller class sizes lead to higher levels of student

achievement. School-to-work and service learning opportunities are valued in rural areas.

6. **Students.** Students in rural schools tend to support one another such activities as peer mentoring. There is a low drop-out rate.
7. **Community.** There is a strong work ethic among people living in rural areas. People living in rural communities tend to know one another and they act in more "family-like" manners, with strong traditions of family leadership and involvement. Rural communities tend to have a strong value system and a deep sense of community pride. This support is felt by the schools, the teachers and the students.
8. **School-Community.** The schools within rural communities are very visible and they are strongly connected with the community. Rural schools are often the largest building and the largest employer. In many ways, the school defines the community, serving as the cultural center. The schools tend to have "open door" policies and often serve as community-centers with the building open late for various activities. There are many volunteers eager to help the school.
9. **Rural Life.** Rural communities tend to be safe, with lower incidence of violence and crime and fewer discipline problems in the schools. Rural communities tend to have strong local churches. These communities are often typified by the natural environment and opportunities for recreation.

Challenges Facing Rural Schools

1. **Funding.** Rural schools face extreme fiscal problems. Revenues are limited, if not declining and the QEO restricts options. Cuts lead to competition between departments; not cooperation. School funding problems (rural schools, high cost programs, reductions in categorical aids). Reductions in school-to-work funding. Lack of funding for certain activities, events and supplies.
2. **Declining Enrollment.** Rural schools tend to have declining enrollment.
3. **Pupil Transportation.** Rural schools face major problems with funding the cost of transportation.
4. **Curriculum.** Funding limitations often results in a limited range of curricular options and a lack of advance placement course offerings. When classes are combined to save resources, this results in large class sizes.
5. **Mandates.** There are many unfunded state and federal mandates that pose problems for the schools. (For example, the testing requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act; implementing PI 34; Testing requirements; schools in need of improvement.; Open enrollment; etc.)

6. **Staffing.** Staffing problems are sometimes caused by teacher turn-over and retirement and the difficulty of attracting teachers and in retaining teachers due to salary limitations. Teachers and administrators are asked to wear many hats and to work long hours on school-related projects. They are sometimes held to a higher standard than others in the community. In some rural schools there is a revolving door of administration. It is sometimes difficult to meet the development needs of the staff. Lack of specific in-service training relating to rural schools.
7. **Health Care/Community Services.** Rural communities sometimes face challenges due to limitations in available health care and other supporting community and social services. The increasing cost of health care is a major rural issue. There is often a lack of public transportation and available housing for new families and teachers. Rural communities may be naive to larger-city issues
8. **Governance.** The school boards in rural schools sometimes don't provide the right leadership. Rural communities are resistant to change. There is a lack of diversity in background and opinion. Weaknesses are magnified as small groups have wide influence. Sometimes ore-conceived notions can result in low community expectations.
9. **Facilities.** Rural schools are sometimes very old and in need of repair. The schools textbooks and equipment may also be obsolete. School buildings are sometimes not available to meet the needs of the community or community groups. It can be difficult to make strong connections with the community.
10. **Geography.** Rural schools tend to be geographically isolated. Problems are sometimes caused by rural school boundaries overlapping with other governmental jurisdictions (towns, villages, counties). Access to cultural resources is often limited.
11. **Demographics.** The rural population is becoming increasingly transient, with increases in the population within the community with no real connection to the community. Many rural areas are becoming "bedroom communities" with a lack of available local jobs. Rural poverty is a factor, as is the rapid increase in the number of non-English speaking students in the district.
12. **Alternative Education.** Rural schools have smaller staffs and offer limited alternative education programs. The isolation of those schools can result in limited teacher resources. Some students need supplemental private lessons (outside of school). Increases in home schooling pose challenges. No jobs or businesses for work-based learning, youth apprenticeships. Rural schools can face challenges in the connection with the technical college.
13. **Special Education.** The special education population is also increasing and it is difficult to recruit and retain special education teachers.

14. **Technology.** Limitations in grant funding sometimes restrict ability to acquire educational technology. When technology is used, there are problems with matching common calendars and schedules.
15. **Students.** Rural schools sometimes place too much emphasis on sports. Rural students sometimes face limited opportunities; other times, they can get over-extended. Students sometimes have problems finding the right group to fit into. There is a rural "brain-drain" with students leaving those communities.

Strengths of Rural Communities

1. **Quality of Life.** Rural communities seem familiar and offer a more simple life (slower pace, less traffic) that results in a high quality of life. These communities are also typified by a "sense of belonging" to a cohesive community that is safer and healthier. Rural communities are comprised of people who watch out for one another and provide support in times of need.
2. **Community.** Communities typically have a welcoming culture with informal communication networks that has everyone involved. There are local traditions and a population base that is rooted in the community. It is easy to become involved in activities and there are many leadership opportunities. There are strong collaborations between people and institutions and people tend to volunteer and become involved in local activities. There is a strong sense of local control and a commitment to providing service along with a lack of divisions on the basis of socioeconomic dimensions. These communities frequently offer lower cost of living.
3. **Institutions.** In rural communities, family and church (spirituality) play a strong role and the schools are seen as having a central defining role. The schools are used for community activities.
4. **Family.** Rural communities are viewed as good places to raise a family with places for children to roam. There are many positive parenting activities and practices. Rural communities tend to recognize student achievement. There are many intergenerational activities and opportunities to establish authentic cultural activities.
5. **Tranquility.** Rural communities offer peaceful isolation in a natural environment with surrounding beauty. They are frequently located in decent proximity to metropolitan areas; offering the best of both worlds.
6. **Students.** More students are saying they want to return to the community (than in the past). Job fairs held in the schools bring local employers; teaming with local chambers of commerce.
7. **Teachers.** Teachers are viewed as community members and leaders. They frequently make an effort to spend their dollars in the community. Teachers can be technology experts in the community.

Challenges Facing Rural Communities

1. **Destination.** Many young people in rural areas are leaving and it is hard to recruit young families to live in rural areas. There are limited employment opportunities and a lack of affordable housing. There are limited activities for children and young adults, and there are long distances to shopping and many desired recreational activities.
2. **Politics.** Rural areas have a sense of community pride that can also represent a resistance to change and difficulties faced by newcomers to feel that they are accepted by the rural community. It is hard to recruit leaders. There is a tendency toward fiscal conservatism. Sometimes issues tend to become over-emotionalized. There is also a lack of participation or apathy in some instances. There can be a tendency toward gossip, with too much information spread too broadly. It can be difficult for rural communities to share resources such as public services or facilities (libraries, swimming pools, etc.).
3. **Leaders.** Since there are fewer people, there is a shortage of community leaders and active participants can suffer from burnout. There can also be fall-out from the entanglement of problems from personal relationships within that community.
4. **Demographics.** Demographics are also changing (decreasing population; increasing age) with an increase in the presence of rural poverty, the elderly and other retired individuals (with no connections to the schools or community). The income gap seems to be growing (more with more, more with less). There are many broken marriages. There are increases in the use of immigrant workers. There continues to be a lack of diversity, though.
5. **Development.** Some businesses are failing and there are limited employment opportunities. There are limited opportunities for economic development. There are limited funds to support the start of new businesses. It is sometimes difficult to balance the need for economic development with the character of remaining rural.
6. **Jobs/Income.** There is a shortage of well-paying jobs (even living wage jobs). Some long-term residents really can no longer afford to continue to live in their communities.
7. **Resources.** State financial aid is limited and there are funding problems facing rural governmental units. Property taxation rates can be unevenly distributed and there are large parcels of tax-exempt land.
8. **Health Care/Social Services.** There are limitations in the availability of health care and other community support services. There are problems with a rising incidence of mental health issues, substance abuse, deterioration of the family structure and other related issues.

9. **Isolation/Distance.** Rural communities have a sense of isolation from the surrounding region. There are long travel distances to shopping, higher education, and other communities. There is a lack of availability and convenience for various support services. For those rural areas that serve as “bedroom communities,” there is a limitation of future possibilities. Social and cultural opportunities are limited.
10. **Decline.** Some rural communities are in a state of perpetual decline, and it is hard to make those communities look attractive. In some instances, it is hard to define what even constitutes the sense of community. In some rural areas there is a deterioration of the supporting infrastructure (roads, power, telecommunication, advanced technology).
11. **Families.** It is hard to keep young families in the community.
12. **Schools.** The prospect of a school closing would devastate the community. So much of the general curriculum is tested; it moves very quickly. Little time left for community activities. Many teachable moments are lost. There are difficulties associated with efforts to keep the school as the focus of the community. In some rural areas, the teachers live in other communities. It is hard for the schools to maintain local control, especially in light of federal education mandates under the No Child Left Behind Act. There are many unfunded state and federal mandates. It can be difficult for the schools to communicate with the taxpayers. It can be hard to integrate education with employment and careers.

Strengths of the Rural Economy

1. **Workforce.** The rural economy is well served by a self-reliant, loyal, and well educated workforce that has a very strong work ethic, despite being a relatively lower-paid workforce. There is an entrepreneurial spirit and a strong presence of self employment and local business ownership.
2. **Costs.** Rural areas can have a lower cost of living, and lower rental and property costs. The availability of public services can attract people.
3. **Schools.** The public schools are the main economic force in many rural communities. The school may be the largest employer. The spending power of students is significant. Local rural businesses tend to be interested in the schools and will provide strong support for student activities. Businesses help students find jobs. There is strong financial support for the schools. School personnel can be technology experts in the community.
4. **Economy.** Rural economies tend to be smaller with more sustainable emerging businesses. There is an economy of bartering for goods and services.
5. **Environment.** Rural communities offer peace and quiet along with environmental beauty and have recreational and tourism opportunities.

6. **Development.** Rural development is assisted by the efforts of the cooperatives, zoning regulations and available developmental loan programs. There are more developmental incentives evolving, such as business incubators. UW-Extension provides help with economic and resource development.
7. **Loyalty.** Rural communities tend to stay together during economic hard times and there is a sense of loyalty and trust the strengthens local conditions.
8. **Technology.** Technology has shrunk travel distances and rural residents have a willingness to travel to preserve rural homestead.

Challenges Facing the Rural Economy

1. **Economy.** There are limited employment opportunities in the rural economy. Many workers have substandard employment. Many businesses are locally owned. Demographic changes are impacting the economic base. Many residents need to work more than one job. Residents have a lack of discretionary income. It can be hard to pursue development that is respectful of the local environment. There can be community resistance to growth. There can be a reluctance to accept newcomers. The rural economy lacks an industrial base. Limitations in the rural economy (unemployment and poverty) may not be reflected in accepted measures and indicators. The local economy can lack diversity. It can also be very difficult to develop a sound plan for economic development. There may be a lack of requisite infrastructure. There can be resistance to use new businesses. Higher transportation and shipping costs can limit growth. It can be difficult to recruit the workforce. Residents may not spend locally since they buy in larger markets.
2. **Schools.** The public schools are often the largest employer. The school aid formula provides insufficient funding for schools. Schools face problems associated with unfunded state and federal mandates. There are real problems with school funding – 2/3 does not equal 2/3. It can be difficult to get referenda passed. Open enrollment poses problems. Residents may be envious of public school compensation levels.
3. **Distance.** Travel distances and isolation of rural communities also contribute to various social problems. Residents in rural communities face real limitations in the availability of health care, social services, early childhood education and care placement sites.
4. **New Economy/Old Economy.** It is hard to adapt to the new economy. It can be difficult to compete for new businesses. It is hard for local businesses to compete with large chains like Wal-Mart. It can be difficult to develop tourism industry. Weather can pose problems. There are zoning issues. There is tension between the agricultural community and other residents. There has been a reduction in family farms. An increasingly mobile society leads to a sense of urban sprawl.

5. **Limited Funds.** There are real limitations in the state and local funding. There are reductions in the state budget. The property tax tends to be a regressive tax. There is an erosion of the local property tax base as too much property is exempt from taxation. TIF districts can pose problems. Influx of retirees can drive up the property tax rate.
6. **Infrastructure.** There is an aging public infrastructure. There are high transportation costs. The cost of living can be higher in rural areas.
7. **Youth.** There are limited opportunities for recreation and employment of students. Rural youth are leaving the community (brain-drain).

Strengths of Rural Leaders

1. **Visibility.** Rural leaders are known by (and are accessible to) the people and the community that they serve. Rural leadership tends to be a true participatory democracy. A smaller leadership base makes for a larger individual impact. Leaders use technology to access information. They communicate through the use of technology. They tend to be active in networking within various professional groups.
2. **Opportunities.** There are many opportunities to be a leader. Some counties run leadership programs. Retired people are important are leaders. The Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program is effective. Some counties run leadership programs. Business leaders are active with school students. They support the schools. Rural churches tend to be a center of community leadership. There are student leadership opportunities (FFA and Junior Achievement) that encourage school and community relationships.
3. **Effective.** Rural leaders have a commitment to the long haul and have a strong sense of ownership; they understand local political dynamics. People in the town run the town. There is a sense of compassion and the practical knowledge that comes from experienced leadership. Leaders hold multiple elected positions; rural problems are the same as those found elsewhere.

Challenges Facing Rural Leaders

1. **Leadership and Vision.** The community may lack a forward-looking vision for the future. There can be a lack of community involvement or interest. There is a relatively small pool of potential leaders and it can be hard to find leaders. There is a lack of leadership development opportunities. Community pressures (and considerations) may make the potential “cost of leadership” excessive. There can be social costs to leadership and limitations on social life. It can be lonely to be in a leadership position, and these positions can lead to burn-out. Some leaders fail to connect with young adults; don’t recognize the benefit of training those young adults. Some leaders tend to stay in those positions too long.

2. **Leadership.** Leadership can be difficult in the face of nepotism and/or a good old boys network. There can also be a leadership imbalance – “too old and too white and too male.” Some leaders have a focus on a single issue or limited agenda. There can be regional tensions and animosity that make leadership difficult. It can be hard to build bridges between participating and competing entities. It can be difficult for a community to accept women in leadership positions. There can be a lack of diversity of backgrounds, views or opinions. There may be some forms of racism or prejudice.
3. **Roles.** Leaders can be spread too thin as they hold multiple elected positions. Leaders may be on call all of the time. They may lack privacy. Their efforts may be hindered by a local of volunteers. There can be limited opportunities for networking and training. There can be time pressures. There can be a sense of isolation.
4. **Limitations.** The community may have limited choices in community service organizations or opportunities. An aging population tends to run service organizations, with more limited opportunities for others to assume leadership positions. Young families lack the time to contribute to leadership. It can be very difficult to convince someone to run for elective office.
5. **Challenges.** It can be difficult for leaders to forge consensus for change. Leaders may lack the breadth of vision for the future. They may be fueled by personal convictions, personal attacks: a personal agenda versus the common good. There can be long-standing, festering family feuds
6. There are problems posed by meeting the needs of a transient population. Rural leaders may be hindered by a lack of comprehensive planning. There can be high leadership turnover. There can be friction or tension between governmental boards (e.g., town board v school board). There are limited opportunities for young voices to be heard. Young people are leaving rural communities (brain-drain).
7. **School Boards.** Some school boards have a tendency to micromanage affairs. All school leaders face real problems with the revenue limits and the school funding formula. It can be difficult to recruit and retain teachers. It can be hard to attract new, young families. No training is provided to teachers on the rural challenge.
8. **Local v. State.** Local resources are constrained and the relationship with state government can tend to be adversarial. Relations between leaders at different levels of government service may be typified by a lack of support and understanding.

Part Two – Policy Ideas

Brainstorming Alternative Approaches Rural Schools, Communities, Economics, and Leaders

Note: The following items are the “raw” policy initiatives or action items that were developed by the small groups to be responsive to improving the conditions found in rural Wisconsin in each of the following areas: (1) rural schools, (2) rural communities, (3) rural economics, and (4) rural leadership. This is the raw data, with those items that were mentioned more than once listed at the top of each section.

Relating to Rural Schools

- Simplify funding formulas; Pursue funding formula that stresses adequacy scarcity, poverty and special ed issues.
- Use distance learning/virtual classes; schedule every other year; best practices of sharing. Independent studies; youth options. Collaborative process between higher education and public schools.
- Transportation costs.
- Teacher pay; dump QEO/capped revenues; address brain drain.
- Special education paid for by state at a rate of 66% to 80%.
- Seek other sources of funding (not solely linked to property taxes).
- No unfunded mandates; *No Child Left Behind*; additional mandates need to be addressed in funding formula, i.e. ELL.
- Study health care costs and impact on salary.
- Teacher retention, equity--salary, economic—loan forgiveness program for teachers in rural areas--support PI 34 mentoring, regional networking. Encourage community orientation and welcome.
- School public relations; develop support for small schools. Involve *Wisconsin Rural Challenge*.
- Create DPI rural advisory council or office of rural education. Provide support, researched ED practices, training, and technical support.
- Collaboration among districts: professional development and expertise sharing: more CESA involvement; CESA support for teachers.
- Increased funding related to declining enrollment; sliding scale to equalize economy.
- Curriculum—teachers need multiple certifications; more flexibility in specialized area.
- Contact/educate/support legislators and other elected officials.
- Encourage entrepreneurial spirit in schools/freedom to do so.
- Five-year plan to develop strategies to fund schools for long term.
- Open enrollment.
- Administrator retention.

- Cooperation between public and private schools.
- Community/school relationships.
- Declining enrollment.
- Build statewide and regional coalitions of rural partners specific to rural schools.
- Educate/inform all legislators about financial issues and challenges of rural schools.
- Rural reinvestment.
- Less time on the bus; distance is a real challenge.
- Remove/change funding calculation from per student to another factor(s); acknowledge fixed costs.
- Annual, regular rural Lobby Day.
- Contact/educate/support lobbyists of rural communities.
- State provide a flat mill rate for—option for local districts for a 1, 2, or 3 mill option.
- Continue study of seamless PK-16 education.
- Have a regional hub to provide subjects such as tech ed—a center, a place for area kids to receive opportunities that school can't provide.
- Look at license flexibility within curriculum areas.
- What is a free and appropriate education? Do all the new fees exclude kids? How exclusive are some of the things we are offering?
- Study various options such as having a tech ed focused high school and a college-bound high school.
- Get retired people more involved in the schools; youth teaching retirees; youth driving elderly.
- Flexible funding for benefit of the students.
- Partner with other states.
- Align goals with union/district/communities.
- Lower property taxes.
- Collaboration versus consolidation.
- Tax credits/incentives to encourage participation in service learning.
- Encourage teacher's voice.
- Shorter weeks with community involvement.
- Facilitate easier transfer for special ed students under open enrollment (limiting financial impact on the "sending" district.)
- Support post secondary education.
- Focus on "real" leadership opportunities for young people, i.e. FFA; link student leadership opportunities to the community.
- Vouchers bleed school districts.
- Centralize financial administration of districts in a low profile business office, but keep the schools in place and thriving within the local community. Even a small school is vital to the health of its community.
- Expand cooperation among school boards.
- Make school buildings available for community use; youth, community organizations.
- Develop policies that will foster greater access to grants in rural areas.

- Make AP and other high quality classes available to students regardless of where they live.
- Reexamine youth apprenticeship and School to Work programs so that isolated rural schools are able to offer these courses.
- Work with trade unions to examine how to bring trade courses into schools including programs such as permitting trade people to teach in cooperation with licensed teachers or permitting instructors at technical colleges to teach in high schools.
- Gather and disseminate, through neutral sources, information about the true costs of consolidation.
- DPI review plans and policies to assure equity of service to rural areas—define rural.
- Encourage sharing of resources and services among districts, i.e. sports, staff, superintendent, bus manager.
- How small can a district become and still retain its integrity? What is the critical mass? What is the role of a public school system?
- Keep politics out of it.
- Establish distance learning standards.
- Review all mandates, funded or unfunded, to determine whether they apply to the goals of our schools.
- Promote partnerships with community resources such as libraries.
- Develop a rural student advocacy group. Ask them what they want/need.
- Stronger initiative to apply education to real work environment.
- Establish a community assistance team to help school staff with study halls, lunchroom duty, etc., that is not during instructional time.
- Charter and outreach programs to serve home school students so district receives funds for them.
- Use technology to recapture nontraditional kids.
- Continue funding for technology initiatives.
- Make teachers state employees or create benefit pools.
- Synchronize funding calendars.
- Improve commitment to staff training.
- Educate public on rural issues and their effect on schools and communities.

Relating to Rural Communities

- Schools become center of lifelong education/training in the community, intergenerational.
- Networking opportunities for local governments . . . opportunities to meet with other local government officials in various regions in the state to address issues on increasing tax base, housing, recreation, etc.
- Establish school community partnerships: 1. enhance cultural events and opportunities; 2. community education; 3. business support partnerships; 4. civic group partnerships; 5. expand service learning-place-based opportunities.
- Develop policies that encourage youth to participate in local governments. For example, student members on school and village boards.

- Cost of living: promote economic efficiency and quality of living in small communities.
- Address property tax issues.
- DPI collaborate with other state agencies on poverty issues, i.e. census data versus school lunch data.
- Improve housing options, i.e. more starter homes.
- Schools need to provide cultural opportunities.
- Economic incentives to encourage development.
- Keep schools open to foster community ownership, cooperation, and communication. As space becomes available, use schools as greater community centers housing social services, post office, health services, senior center, law enforcement, meals-on-wheels, public library, and government services.
- Affordable health care.
- Support policies that encourage partnerships and cooperation among all governmental bodies.
- Equitable distribution of social services.
- Incentives to locate business and jobs in rural communities.
- Local forums to educate local residents in the area of leadership . . . to encourage new people in the communities to take positions on the school board, town council, etc.
- Use “virtual” meetings to provide networking opportunities.
- Encourage entrepreneurships in smaller communities.
- Look within the local community for economic development.
- Restrictions on agricultural development.
- Understanding of cultural classes.
- Leadership training.
- Decrease disincentives for compensation issues. (Work-study)
- Encourage volunteerism; liability issue for volunteers.
- Community to School-School to Community work programs.
- Human service offices in the school.
- Community investment in broad band access.
- Entrepreneurship classes: develop for adults and students. Curriculum with a rural focus.
- Create more programs and activities for young people; support a person (position) to lead these programs.
- Nurture minority involvement in leadership roles.
- Grow the economic base, quit luring retirees as the main focus.
- Expand business opportunities.
- Understand managed, controlled growth.
- Communities need to understand what people in their communities want.
- Find a way to give tools to communities to encourage adults and youth to work together.
- State organizations provide “rural strands” in their conferences; education for all organizations on youth based initiatives.

- Establish an annual network for sustaining rural schools and the communities they serve. Produce a progress report annually.
- Communities should go through a visioning process or forum.
- Leadership training for school, town, and business on rural challenges.

Relating to Rural Economics

- Improve health care access and quality
- Improve worker wages Fair wages
- Develop a “canned” program for communities to engage in planning and economic development.
- Develop incubator program
- Bring high speed DSL into rural communities to foster business development. Create financial incentives to make it attractive to providers.
- Encourage historic preservation.
- Encourage downtown/small business development.
- Coordinate economic development with schools.
- Develop career-related learning opportunities for students with adults from the community.
- Promote awareness among community via local media.
- Develop progressive community vision, i.e. family-friendly communities.
- Continue and expand collaboration to promote discussion and action on state and regional basis. DPI provides leadership and coordination.
- Attract small businesses: financial incentives, expand enterprise zone in rural areas and balance with wise development, unleash creativity of kids to develop and retain small business, make community aware of small business opportunities.
- Hold open meetings with youth and adults to brainstorm and prioritize needs.
- Research by Work Force Development to identify effective rural economic development.
- Encourage relevant entrepreneurship within schools. Develop realistic policy and funding to encourage more business/school partnerships.
- Enforce P.I.L.T.
- Establish insurance and benefit groups for owner-operators of small businesses, i.e. five or fewer employees in towns of 1,000 population or less.
- Community attitude toward business.
- Economic planner position.
- Recognize agriculture as an economic driver and provide policies and incentives to move that industry forward.
- Define new sustainability, i.e. jobs, development, urban sprawl.
- Figure out how to help communities define what sustainability means for them and their communities. (There are levels of sustainability: Is South Shore the same as Elk Mound?)
- Is it realistic to think we can change rural Wisconsin into what we think we want it to be?

- Do citizens really want a growth community? They come to/stay in small communities to escape/avoid the things that progress brings.
- What are Wisconsin's priorities?
- Make it easier for schools and communities to share resources—liability insurance.
- Can small communities pay for the infrastructure they need?
- Better marketing.
- Continue to provide safety and security.
- End unfunded mandates.
- More state support for micro-businesses.
- Hire more support professionals from the community.

Relating to Rural Leadership

- Get more people involved, especially encourage young people to pursue leadership (and receive credit) through mentoring
- Sponsor leadership training programs release time for participation
- Make sure the technology infrastructure is in place for all small town and rural leadership and organizations.
- Marketing--make it attractive so people want to get involved.
- Focus on civility within the community; community comes together for the common good.
- Encourage service learning.
- Provide opportunities for rural leaders to network.
- Educate entire state in the “Senior Tax-Exchange” program and encourage rural communities to participate in it.
- Term limits for elected positions—nurture next generation.
- Youth involvement in government meetings, service organizations, etc., for academic credit.
- Bring community leaders into classes for community-based civics.
- Develop support for school administrator's network.
- Use county/school facilities.
- Understand that one size fits all solutions do not necessarily apply in rural areas. Look through rural eyes. Create rural advisory group.

Part Three

Rural Policy Network Forum Prioritized Listing of Policy Recommendations

Note: On Friday, January 30, 2004, attendees at the Rural Policy Network Forum in Wausau were divided into 15 groups that each independently developed a prioritized listing of five specific policy recommendations. The various recommendations from all of these groups were then subsequently reviewed for the topics they addressed and the similarity of recommendations. To present this prioritized listing, points were assigned to items from each topical area to group these items in this summary tally.

1. Rural School Funding

Policy Statement: There should be a comprehensive review of school funding issues, with particular attention devoted to the special needs, characteristics and circumstances facing Wisconsin's rural schools.

Move toward a more equitable funding system that levels the playing field and adequately funds rural education. Review the enrollment-based character of the funding formula. Take into account such factors as: population sparsity, poverty, special education, transportation costs.

Provide more financial help with the relatively high transportation costs that are common in rural schools. Remove transportation costs from the funding formula.

Since many rural areas are "property rich" but "cash poor," explore alternative sources of funding (e.g., income tax, sales tax, review of exemptions from property taxation) that would reduce reliance on the property tax as a primary funding mechanism.

Provide additional funding flexibility and review and provide relief for unfunded state and federal mandates.

Provide flexibility with respect to Revenue Caps – provide waivers to encourage school districts to share services; allow 1-2 percent increases in spending without going to referendum, factor in impact of declining enrollment.

Review categorical aid reimbursements for special education – address the issue of funding high-cost special needs students.

2. Rural Leadership

Policy Statement: Undertake a comprehensive and broadly-based effort to help strengthen and improve the quality of leadership in Wisconsin's rural areas, with special emphasis on those efforts that help to help build future leaders by providing developmental opportunities for rural youth to become active participants in setting the future course for rural schools and rural communities.

Have the State Superintendent work in active partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Extension to ensure that comprehensive statewide efforts are being undertaken in such areas as: identifying, developing and nurturing rural leaders. These efforts should help to reinforce other activities that are presently being undertaken by such groups as: the YCC Program (Youth Connecting Communities), Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program, Wisconsin Rural Partners, Wisconsin Rural Challenge, Wisconsin Community Education Association, 4-H, FFA, FBLA, JA, Jr., Kiwanis and Jr. Rotary.

Provide mentoring for new leaders, offer both formal and informal development programs, encourage youth participation on various boards and committees.

3. Rural Collaboration and Partnerships

Policy Statement: Encourage the development of various collaborative programs and efforts that will help to strengthen and improve the ability of rural schools and rural communities to work in creative and innovative ways to advance issues of common interest.

Help rural community development by getting all community stakeholders involved in efforts to improve the lines of community, understand challenges, and encourage cooperative efforts by having a set of shared priorities.

Encourage the development of active and engaged PK-16 efforts involving public and private educational institutions at all levels (pre-school, technical college, UW Colleges, UW four-year universities, and private colleges and universities). Establish incentives and methods for school districts to share resources and collaborate on issues.

Create awareness and opportunities for cooperation, collaboration and partnership (e.g., schools, libraries, local and county government, businesses, community organizations, civic groups, chambers of commerce, medical institutions, technical colleges, community arts programs, Main Street programs, etc.). Create life-long learning centers.

Encourage school-business partnerships. Help develop partnerships involving intra-governmental cooperation (e.g., local, state, tribal).

4. Rural Economic Development

Policy Statement: Develop policies that encourage and promote economic development, entrepreneurship, and growth in the state's rural communities.

Help to foster comprehensive and broadly inclusive local community-based economic development opportunities.

Stabilize employment markets and create new opportunities for better use of existing human resource talent.

Focus on establishing business incubators, assisting entrepreneurship, promoting small businesses and encouraging other efforts that will keep or bring high quality jobs to rural areas.

Pay special attention to the needs of the state's agricultural base, providing tax incentives and other means to preserve that sector.

5. Rural Advisory Committee

Policy Statement: Establish and create a state-level rural policy advisory committee that will oversee efforts relating to various rural policy initiatives.

Starting first with the Department of Public Instruction, and possibly expanding later to serve in a broader oversight role for other state issues, the committee should advise the State Superintendent on the special needs and challenges associated with rural education and the various efforts that can be undertaken to help to strengthen rural schools and the communities they serve.

This committee should help to ensure equality of services that are provided to the state's rural areas with special attention being devoted to rural poverty-related issues.

This committee should ensure that policy efforts are properly envisioned and implemented and that there is a collection of appropriate data to ensure that decisions are made on the basis of sound data.

6. Rural Marketing

Policy Statement: Develop a comprehensive statewide marketing effort that showcases the many advantages associated with living and working in rural Wisconsin.

Encourage the relocation of young families to rural areas. For rural areas facing challenges associated with the availability of affordable housing, undertake efforts to help address that obstacle.

Provide encouragement and employment opportunities for rural youth to remain in their communities after completing their education.

7. Rural Service Learning

Policy Statement: Encourage rural schools and communities to develop strong service learning programs that will provide rural students with significant exposure to issues relating to the strength and vitality of rural communities.

Rural schools should work in active partnership with local groups and organizations (governmental, business, civic organizations and boards) to provide meaningful educational opportunities and experiences for rural youth. These efforts should concentrate on helping to develop leadership skills and abilities among rural youth.

Other Policy Suggestions

Rural Vitality.

Policy Statement: Develop a comprehensive effort that will raise visibility and awareness of the challenges facing rural communities.

The State Superintendent should work with the UW System Board of Regents and UW-Extension in helping to encourage and promote regional discussions and dialogue on rural issues, including the quality of life, accessibility to adequate, affordable and accessible housing, health care, and senior care in rural communities. Rural communities should define and establish their own priorities.

Encourage all state organizations to provide focused attention on understanding the unique characteristics and challenges facing Wisconsin's rural communities.

Rural School Grant Writing.

Policy Statement: Rural schools should be encouraged to coordinate cooperative and collaborative grant writing activities.

Teacher Licensure.

Policy Statement: The State Superintendent should pursue changes in federal law that will provide greater flexibility in teacher staffing to rural schools; additionally, the State Superintendent should review licensure issues to provide flexibility for teacher licensure within curricular areas.

Federal requirements now establish detailed rules relating to teacher quality and certification. Since teachers in rural areas teach many subjects, they may need special consideration (e.g., waivers) because they teach of multiple subjects.

School Administration.

Policy Statement: Rural schools facing financial constraints should consider the centralization of administrative services (leadership and financial management) by forming a single business office without actually consolidating the participating school districts.

Distance Learning.

Policy Statement: The state should provide support for the expansion of available distance learning opportunities (through Badger Net, virtual courses and online learning).

Open Enrollment.

Policy Statement: The state's existing open enrollment system should be reviewed as it poses financial challenges, fragments schools communities and districts and is regressive in the sense that it is not equal for all families.

Insurance Groups.

Policy Statement: The state should help encourage the establishment of insurance and benefits group(s) for owner/operators in small business, particularly in the state's rural areas.

Technology.

Policy Statement: The state should make sure that rural communities have access to the technology infrastructure required for effective rural leadership and organization.

Attachments - agenda and list of participants

Appendix A – Agenda

Rural Policy Network Sustaining Wisconsin’s Rural Schools and The Communities They Serve

Thursday, January 29, 2004

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 11:00 a.m. | Registration |
| 11:45 a.m. | Opening Remarks
Tony Evers
Deputy State Superintendent

Ginger Reynolds
Learning Point Associates |
| 12:00 noon | Lunch |
| 12:30 p.m. | Musical Performance
Spencer High School Handbell Ensemble
Rosanne Cadmus, Nicole Feind, Justin Foth,
Heidi Ertl, Jamis Keding, Amanda Kops,
Jason Nemec, Josh Nemec,
Nicole Pescinski, and Bill Tucker
Diane Veale, Director |
| 12:45 p.m. | Welcome
Elizabeth Burmaster
State Superintendent |
| 1:00 p.m. | Break |
| 1:15 p.m. | Why Rural Education and Communities Matter
Rachel Tompkins, President
Rural School and Community Trust |
| 1:45 – 2:15 p.m. | The Rural Profile
Terry Ludeman, Economist
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

Randy Dunn, Southern Illinois University |

- 2:15-3:00 p.m.** **Panel Discussion**
Terry Ludeman (facilitator)
- Kathleen Martinsen, District Administrator**
Rosholt School District
- Jerry Sondreal, Editor**
Amery Free Press
- Rick Rolfsmeyer**
Wisconsin Rural Challenge
- Christian Meier, Teacher**
Phelps School District
- Joan LeFebvre, Family Living Agent**
UW-Extension
- 3:00 – 3:15 p.m.** **Break**
- 3:15 p.m.** **Needs Assessment**
Small Group Activity #1
- 4:45 p.m.** **Reconvene in large group**
- 6:00 p.m.** **Dinner – Atrium**
- 7:00 p.m.** **Celebrating Rural Wisconsin: A Showcase of Talent**
Rural Youth as Artists
Tim and Connie Friesen
Arts Vitally Enrich Communities (AVEC)
- Service Learning**
Ceri Billings
Joe Clay
Flambeau High School
- Youth Connecting Communities**
Kameron Kiley
Melissa Kiley
Dan Mezera

**Krista Walters
Wauzeka-Steuben High School**

Friday, January 30, 2004

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 7:00 a.m. | Breakfast
Crystal Ball Room |
| 7:30 a.m. | Morning Greetings
Tony Evers |
| 7:45 a.m. | Developing an Action Plan
Small Group Activity #2
Tom Grogan
DPI |
| 9:30 a.m. | Break |
| 9:45 a.m. | Prioritizing the Action Plans
Small Group Activity #3 |
| 11:30 a.m. | Next Steps and Comments
Tony Evers
Ginger Reynolds |
| 11:45 | Words of Appreciation
Elizabeth Burmaster |
| 12:00 p.m. | Lunch |
| 1:00 p.m. | Adjourn |

Appendix B

Wisconsin Rural Policy Network Sustaining Wisconsin's Rural Schools and The Communities They Serve January 29-30, 2004

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