



Tabletop Session Summary

August 12, 2021

Cross-sector Collaborations for Equity in Rural Communities

Presenters: Mike Hogg, [Partners for Education, Berea College, KY](#); Allison Poindexter, [Delta Health Alliance](#); Kyle Serrette, [National Education Association](#)

This tabletop discussion examined cross-sector partnerships that have been successful in rural communities to address inequities and transform schooling.

Session Highlights

- » Many factors lead to a lagging indicator (i.e., graduation rates, attendance, and college readiness). Sometimes things are simplified that are more complex. Engaging more deeply with stakeholders can lead to solutions that ultimately bring about desired outcomes. Schools don't have to do this work alone but can collaborate with cities, counties, and other governmental agencies to achieve change.
- » Partners for Education at Berea College serves 50,000 students in Appalachian Kentucky, from cradle to career. Their program model is to implement programs, build capacity, and foster equitable ecosystems. They hold two Promise Neighborhoods, four Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grants and have other federal and private programming. They have 43 school district partners including small, independent districts of 400 students and large county districts of 10,000 students. The large number of counties in the state creates many partners in the work.
- » They are currently in a discovery phase of what school can look like, building on lessons learned during the pandemic. For example, virtual school worked well for some students and not others; and family engagement increased during this unprecedented period. Schools also caught the attention of some entities in the state that had not shown interest in the past. This new interest presents opportunities for new partnerships.
- » The Mississippi Delta is unique in its geography and is one of the most underserved regions in the United States. While agriculture is still a mainstay in the region, the mechanization of agriculture has meant that it is not the largest employer. They have two Promise Neighborhoods, both of which are communities with at least a third of residents living below the federal poverty line.
- » Current work in the region has targeted kindergarten readiness, student proficiency, and college and career readiness. While they have seen gains in these areas using evidence-based or promising program models, there are concerns about setbacks due to the pandemic.

Shared Resource

- » [IMLS STEM-Rich Afterschool Making Project](#)
- » [Kearney Agencies Receive Grant for STEM Projects](#)



» [NASA STEM Challenges](#)

» [You for Youth](#)

Questions and Answers on Cross-sector Collaborations for Equity in Rural Communities

What cross-sector partnerships do you have in your community that are helping to drive impact?

Arizona has Cooperative Extension partnerships that focus on health and gardening. The partnerships are a perfect fit for the summer. They have partnerships that include STEM initiatives through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. For example, the NASA engineering design challenge had the participation of nine sites in connecting with scientists virtually.

West Virginia partnered with the national organization, Communities In Schools. Site coordinators were placed in school buildings to remove barriers that prevent students from being successful, which could be anything from a basic need to an academic need. The program was piloted in three counties and will expand to 31 counties when school opens this August. So far, graduation rates have increased, and dropout rates have decreased. Attendance, behavior, and academics are also improving among students who are receiving tiered support from site coordinators.

West Virginia has also allocated their relief funding to 55 school districts. As a result, districts were able to create partnerships to focus on summer learning and help students with unfinished learning.

What advice would you give your colleagues about getting started with partnerships?

Not all partnerships make the difference being sought. It's important to ask the question, "How do we more deeply understand our system?" Identify which partnerships will address current needs versus those that address a root cause. An example of this would be a food pantry. While it can address a current need for food, a longer-term goal is to eliminate the community's need for a food pantry.

