



In the summer of 2004, Youth Professionals and Regional Extension Educators in Community Youth Development were asked to prepare case studies regarding community efforts to coordinate out-of-school time programs. They examined how the coordination occurred and how it impacted availability of programs for young people. They also captured the lessons from the coordination efforts that could help other Minnesota communities work together to increase programs and opportunities for youth. This is one in a series of ten reports.

About The Community

Lewiston, Minnesota, located in the "heart" of Winona County, is also the heart of agriculture in the county. The small community of 1,484 is centrally located between three major urban centers, Rochester (35 miles) and Winona (15 miles) in Minnesota, and La Crosse, Wisconsin (45 miles), which attracts new families looking for small town atmosphere and a reasonable commute to employment opportunities. An active business sector works to keep Lewiston viable.

Winona County is part of the bluff lands area of Minnesota and has hills and valleys carving up most of the topography. This means that roads twist and curve around and through these valleys, which, while beautiful, can mean added miles of travel to any destination.

The Lewiston-Altura School District is one of three in Winona County. It encompasses the central one-third the county, making it geographically long and narrow. Transportation can be a concern for families living on the north or south ends of the district because of the topography mentioned earlier. The public school has three buildings: the high school and elementary school are in Lewiston, and the middle school is in Altura. The towns are ten miles apart, so students are transported back and forth between the two communities.

There are also two private schools in Lewiston with grades K-8 and a combined enrollment of around 130. Most of these students feed into the Lewiston-Altura High School in 9th grade.

DATA FROM THE CENSUS

Population:

Lewiston: 1,484

Altura: 417

Total population of school district,
including townships: 4,119

Population that is school-aged: 25%

Population that is 65 and over: 15%

School Enrollment:

Public school (K-12): 760

Two private schools: 129

Total enrollment: 889

What's Happening in Out-of-School Programming?

If you were to ask the youth of the community what there was to do in out-of-school time they would probably say, "very little" except for the sports and extra-curricular activities that are offered through the schools. But a closer look at the community reveals active youth programs sponsored by the churches in and around Lewiston. The area churches collaborate to host "Fifth Quarter" dances at the community center after home

football and basketball games and these are well attended by students. There is also a strong 4-H club presence in the entire school district. Approximately 150 youth are members of the seven or eight clubs that service the district. These clubs make a visible contribution with community service projects like roadside clean up.

There are also active Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs for elementary through high school age youth in both communities.

Community Education provides before- and after-school childcare programs for elementary-aged students. Fifty-two youth were enrolled in the program this past year. Organizations like 4-H, as well as individual community members, have also collaborated with Community Education to offer after-school enrichment programs. This past year nearly 100 youth in grades K-6 participated one or more times in these opportunities.

Both Lewiston and Altura offer summer recreation programs that focus mainly on sports. This past summer 300 youth participated in softball, tee-ball, and Little League in both communities, and 95 participated in golf at Lewiston. Community Education and 4-H both offer summer day camp experiences for elementary-age youth.

The city of Lewiston has a swimming pool and parks with basketball hoops, baseball diamonds, picnic shelters, and play areas. The high school has tennis courts, and the elementary and middle schools have playground facilities. Lewiston also has a bowling alley, a golf course, a video store, and several restaurants. Many families also take advantage of year-round and summer activities offered by the Winona YMCA, including swim lessons, gymnastics, sports leagues, and day camps.

For most high school age youth, the school is their “hangout” while it is open, usually until 9 or 10 p.m. during the school year. With school sports, play practice, Future Farmers of America, Future Leaders of America, and other extra-curricular opportunities, there is a lot happening at the school. There are open gym and weight room evenings for the whole community on Sunday nights.

The school serves as the site for most out-of-school activities for organizations like 4-H and Scouts, and has not, to this point, had to charge for its use on weekday evenings. Churches usually host their events in their own facilities.

About The Coordination Effort

Mission/Goals:

Although there is no organized coordination effort, there is an informal effort to avoid over scheduling. This network seems to be the result of the community wanting to support its youth.

Leadership:

If there has been any coordination effort, it has usually been under the auspices of Community Education, but this can be a time consuming undertaking and, in general, the informal network has served both communities well.

Membership:

With no organized effort there is no membership, but people usually know or can find out with whom from the various organizations to connect.

Structure:

There is no formal coordination of the out-of-school time opportunities mentioned previously, but there is an informal effort that may be more easily accomplished in small towns. Seeing people in the grocery store, after church, or at a community

event or sports activity are all opportunities coordinating activities. If that fails, a few phone calls to key people can accomplish the same task.

Cost:

With no staff to pay, there are no obvious direct costs. Except for a Community Fund that is utilized for some activities, like the church sponsored Fifth Quarter Dances, the school and each youth-serving organization deals with their costs and funding issues independently.

The impetus for coordination:

Most people involved in the organization of opportunities for youth try to avoid over scheduling for two reasons:

1. So that the youth in the community have more opportunities and choices to participate in, and
2. To try to get the most participation at the programs being planned.

What else has happened to impact availability?

Some examples of how the informal network coordinates programs:

?The school avoids scheduling their summer enrichment program during the week of county fair because of the large number of youth involved in 4-H.

?Churches tend to spread their vacation bible schools throughout the summer so those who wish to can attend them all.

?Most organizations try to work around the two communities' summer recreation programs as much as possible during the first four to six weeks of the summer.

?Most youth programs utilize the school (via announcements, fliers sent home, and/or notices in the school newsletter) to get the word out when needed.

What could stimulate more local action?

A concerted effort to incorporate more "youth voice" could really make a difference in what is offered for the high school-age youth in the community.

Community Education might be the obvious entity to organize that effort by establishing an out-of-school time subcommittee made up of youth, representatives of local youth-serving organizations and churches, and individuals in the community. A group like this could canvas youth of different ages to find out what kids would like to do and how it could be accomplished given the resources of the community.

Implications for other communities:

The informal network to coordinate out-of-school time programs that seems to be working effectively in Lewiston is replicated in many of the other small communities in the area, but some communities struggle. For instance, another small town in the area has had a difficult time over the past few years maintaining a community youth center and keeping it staffed with volunteers. The project started out with good intentions and seemed to be what the youth wanted, but lack of consistent supervision, untrained volunteers, cliques, and so on, have left a sour taste for many.

What makes coordination work for some communities and not others is the unanswered question, and may be one that needs to be studied. It seems to be the magic of being rich in social capital, and that can vary from decade to decade as the personalities of a community change.

We need to find ways to help communities build their social capital and support their families and young people with a wealth of opportunities.

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Sources: www.cfl.state.mn.us;
U.S. Census Bureau