

Community Focus Statement C: Provide quality educational opportunities at all levels

Action Statement C.2: Investigate the declining enrollment and quality of public schools in the mountain communities through community organizing and involvement.

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Benchmark: Rim of the World Unified School District schools consistently rank in the top 25 percent of schools in California.

Champion: Volunteer group or person or can be identified by the community

Estimated Cost: \$8,000–\$40,000



Mary Putnam Henck Intermediate School. Photo source: Rim of the World Unified School District

The decline in attendance at public schools can be the result of a number of issues. Some are specific to the school itself, such as a lack of funding or older materials. Other issues are reflective of regional impacts like an increase in private schools or a decline in local jobs, which forces families to relocate. Poorly performing school systems can have a negative impact on the local economy by driving out families who see better educational opportunities in other areas. Further, students who graduate from underperforming schools can do so ill-prepared for success at a university or struggle to find higher-wage employment. This

negative impact on the labor force can potentially deter companies from investing in the area because of a restricted employment pool.

Communities with concerns about school performance can engage in grassroots school improvement or community organizing programs. These grassroots school improvement programs are initiated by community members and parents in order to facilitate widespread change, as opposed to change that is class- or student-specific. These programs focus on equity issues and are often effective at gathering community support. They focus on collaboration and negotiation between stakeholders, including parents, schools, community institutions, and public officials. Focus areas for community groups looking to improve their existing school systems include the following:

- Identifying policy and system changes related to poor school performance
- Bringing together stakeholders from the community
- Identifying underutilized resources and connections that could create change
- Focusing on widespread changes as opposed to class- or student-specific ones

It is important to remember that this is often a slow and continuous process that bases much of the success it gains on momentum, which is why the investigation must be addressed at a community level and not just by the parents of current students.

| Action | Action Leader | Timeline | Resources |
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| 1. Hold public meetings to establish a committee of concerned residents to work with the school district. | Champion with School District | Month 1 | Transforming Schools through Community Organizing – A Research Review http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/transforming-schools-through-community-organizing-a-research-review Rim of the World Unified School District https://www.rimspd.k12.ca.us/ |
| 2. Meet with the school district and superintendent of school representatives and PTA to begin a dialog of concerns and set a path to research issues and make changes. | Resident committee | Month 2 – 3 | |
| 3. Evaluate the performance of local schools, including specific issues contributing to declining enrollment and quality as applicable. | Resident committee with support of Rim of the World Unified School District, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools | Months 4 - 8 | |
| 4. Identify policy, practice, and funding barriers to addressing declining enrollment and quality, along with other barriers as determined. | Resident committee with support of Rim of the World Unified School District, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools | Months 8–12 | |
| 5. Identify opportunities to remove barriers, including securing assistance from community members and businesses. | Resident committee with support of Rim of the World Unified School District, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools | Months 12–18 | |
| 6. Adjust district operations to resolve identified problems. | Rim of the World Unified School District | Months 18–24 | |
| 7. Monitor district performance, report to community members on performance changes, and adjust operations as needed. | Resident committee with support of Rim of the World Unified School District, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools | Year 2- On-going | |
| 8. Work with Chamber of Commerce and real estate agents to create brochures branches to attract more families to live full time in the mountains | Resident committee | Year 2 | |