

## Securing Funding for Local Schools

Sponsor: Franklin Community Health Network

Location: Farmington, ME

The Franklin Community Health Network (FCHN) is a nonprofit organization composed of four affiliates, Franklin Memorial Hospital, the Healthy Community Coalition (HCC), Evergreen Behavioral Services, and Pine Tree Medical Associates. Franklin Memorial is a small regional facility in Farmington, Maine, that serves the approximately 40,000 residents of Franklin County and surrounding rural populations. The hospital formed the community network in 1991 to organize and manage a full range of medical care and health-related support services. HCC was established for outreach to highly dispersed rural populations. Its services include a Mobile Health Unit that serves more than 1000 individuals per year in 18 rural communities with health education, screenings, immunizations, and a range of preventive services.

FCHN affiliates are engaged in an extensive series of activities with health and social service agencies in the region, as well as representatives of local business and the faith community. Through these partnerships, the hospital and its network have established a statewide and national reputation for local innovations to improve access to health care and address the underlying causes of health problems. Although the State of Maine does not provide funding to support a local public health infrastructure, policy makers frequently cite the network's community health initiatives as models to emulate.

A major focus for FCHN activities involves targeted investment to strengthen community infrastructure. Rural Schools for Equity is one such initiative. Its objective was to secure legislative support for the reformulation of the state property tax allocation for local schools. Historically, whenever the state reallocated these tax revenues, schools in the more populated coastal areas were favored at the expense of rural schools. Further reductions in revenue for schools in the Farmington area would undermine the quality of education, the future potential of local children, the hospital's recruitment and retention of top-notch healthcare professionals, and the region's economy. In order to mobilize the kind of local support that would ultimately gain the attention and support of state lawmakers, a major public campaign was launched.

FCHN's president provided early leadership for the initiative by engaging a number of local stakeholders in a dialogue to examine the issue and to explore the potential interest in a public campaign. One of the first steps he took was to provide \$15,000 in seed funding for the Rural Schools for Equity campaign. He also identified a woman with considerable political experience to lead the campaign. This move stimulated other contributions and engaged many other stakeholders. FCHN also convened a series of meetings with state legislators to discuss the issue and explore alternative strategies. In the course of the campaign, thousands of young people were bused to Augusta, the state capital, to capture legislators' attention. Coordinated efforts also produced extensive coverage in the media through newspapers, radio, and television.

After months of hard work, the successful campaign resulted in legislation to reformulate property tax allocations and increased annual funding for the rural schools in FCHN's service area by \$1.3 million. FCHN demonstrated that effective leadership can yield big results for the larger community, well beyond the immediate interests of health care organizations.

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