**INCREASING STUDENTS’ SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL AND REGIONAL EDUCATION**

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**Author statement:**

This paper has not been previously published nor is it under consideration by another publication.

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**Abstract**

School and community interaction is an important topic in education as evidence suggests that communities that value their local schools engender more positive long-term outcomes and a strengthening of the social capital for the students from those schools. Although school and parent interaction has been explored from the parents’ perceptive, less research has occurred from the perspective of the key stake holders and leaders of a community, particularly in rural, regional, and disadvantaged areas. The context for this exploration is the Australian state of Tasmania, and the research findings have implications for policy makers, school leaders and teachers both nationally and internationally. Eighty-six rural, regional, and disadvantaged community leaders and community members responded to a survey, indicating the level and type of involvement they and their organisations had with local schools. The evidence from their comments suggests that community business and social leaders can play an important role as advocates for their local schools, as well as being a source of information, advice, and service to schools. In particular this paper provides a foundation for future research with community members on their involvement in schooling and the impact of this involvement on students’ social capital.

**Key words:** community, rural education, school completion, social capital, students

**Research highlights:**

* There has been limited research on school and community interaction from the perspective of community business and social leaders.
* 77 community partner organisations were associated with 275 specific activities across four activity foci: student centered, family centered, school centered, and community centered.
* 40% of the reported interventions were school centered activities, followed by student centered (31%), community centered (27%), and family centered (1%).
* Communities that value their local schools potentially engender a strengthening of the social capital for students from those schools.

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