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Central Ohio School and Business Partnerships: Shared and Divergent Perspectives

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Section 1



Central Ohio School and Business Partnerships *Shared and Divergent Perspectives: Business and Superintendent Survey Results*

INTRODUCTION

In spring of 2015, the Central Ohio region sponsored two surveys to generate data pertaining to K-12 school-business partnerships: two surveys encompassing Central Ohio Superintendents and businesses

- ∇ All 67 Superintendents in Central Ohio were invited to participate in the survey – 24 responded
- ∇ The business survey was distributed to all private businesses in the advanced manufacturing, Information Technologies, logistics, and health care industries throughout Central Ohio.
- ∇ The survey yielded over 300 business responses. Throughout these replies, several themes emerged indicating critical differences in partnership perceptions and implementations.
- ∇ The two sectors identify similar tools to enhance partnerships.

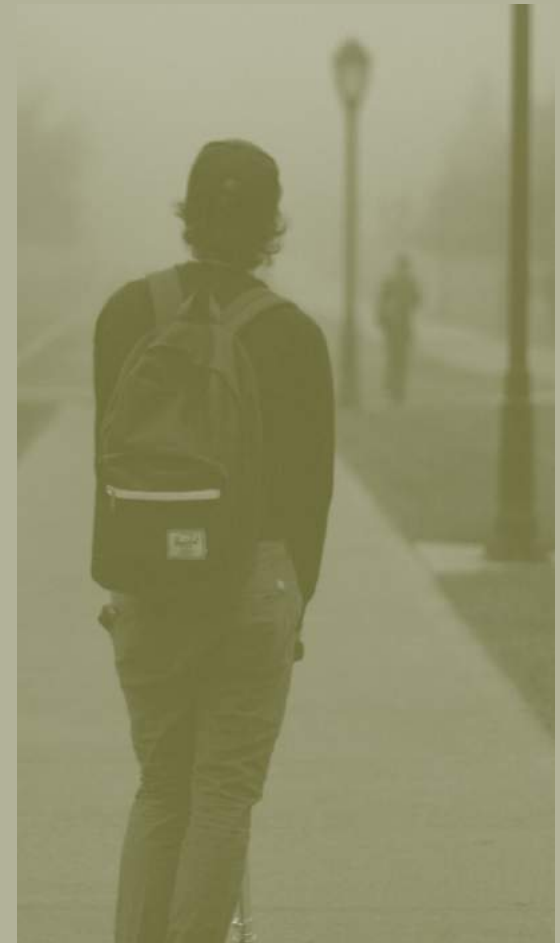


DIRECT BUT NOT DEEP SUPPORT

The surveys indicate that businesses are involved with schools, but it is typically not a deep engagement.

- ▽ Over 95% of superintendents reported some form of business engagement with their schools. This is the same percentage as was found in a similar national survey of superintendents conducted by the Harvard Business School.
- ▽ Only 12% of businesses see themselves as *deeply involved* in their school-business partnerships.
- ▽ Meanwhile, 17% of Superintendents think businesses are deeply involved. The national percentage for Superintendents who report deep involvement by businesses was 12%.
- ▽ The ways businesses report that they are commonly engaged with K-12 schools corroborates this finding of wide, not deep engagement. (*See table below*).
- ▽ Both the businesses and Superintendents identify more businesses involved via direct support by donating money, goods, equipment, and career speakers, and by encouraging employees to volunteer in schools.

Key Points from Superintendents...	National Results	Central Ohio Results
Some form of business involvement with schools	95%	95.7%
Deep involvement of businesses in the schools	12%	17.4%
Direct support from businesses by monetary donations	80%	79.2%
Direct support from businesses by donations of goods or equipment	75%	70.8%
Support from businesses via district level improvements	38%	58.3%
Support from businesses assisting with curriculum development	20%	16.7%
Support from businesses by providing professional development to teachers	23%	8.3%



Rarely reported long-term relationship experiences include:

- Joint curriculum development
- Teacher professional development
- Scaling up successful school-based programs

POSITIVE IMPRESSIONS AND LIMITED EVIDENCE

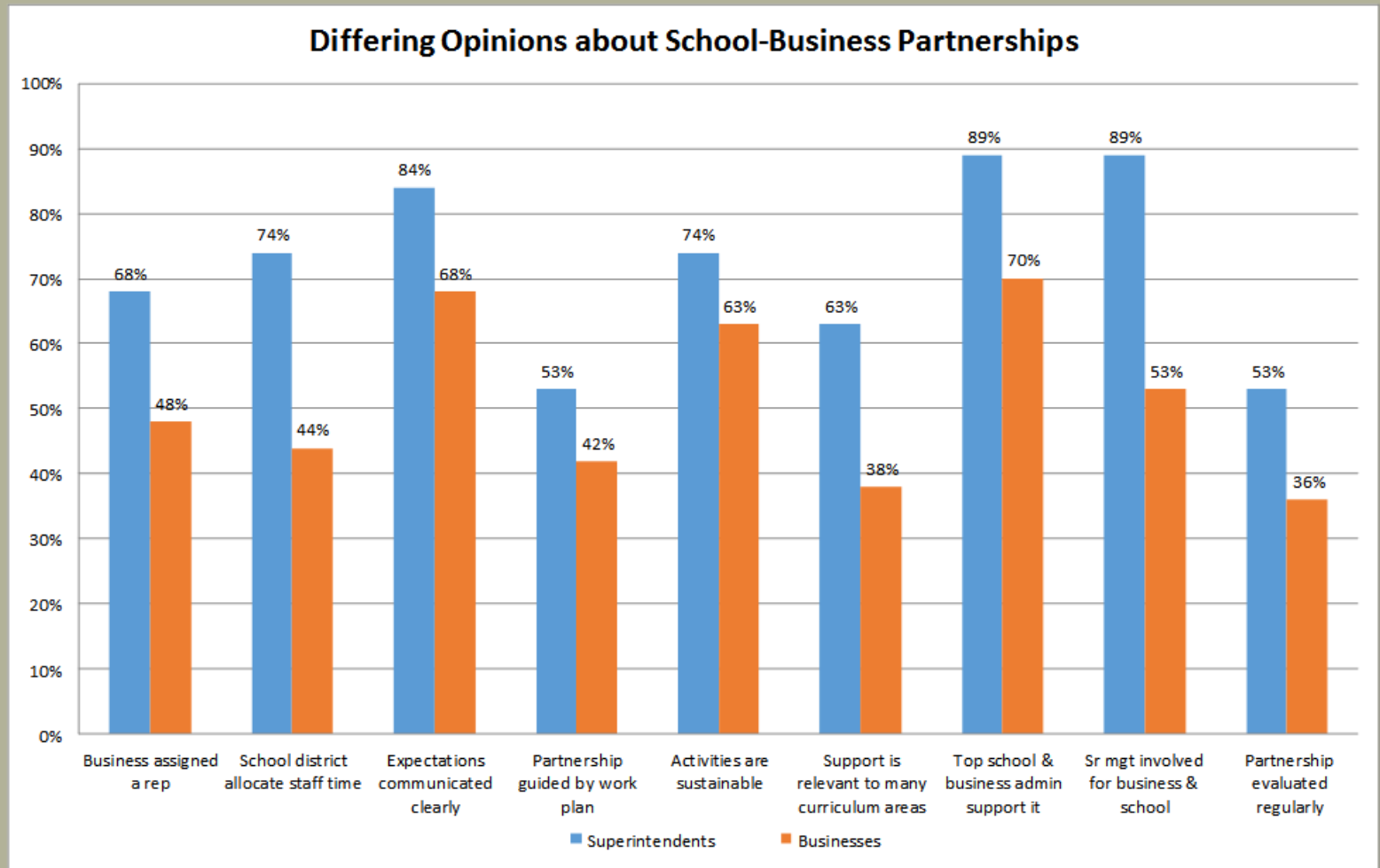
The chart on the following page provides two insights:

1. Superintendents are more favorable towards school-business partnerships than businesses.
2. Evaluations of partnerships are rarely completed.

There is little evidence to support the opinions presented, such as how sustainable the activities really are. Relying on opinions alone results in wide disconnects between Superintendents' and businesses' perceptions, as measured by a comparison of Superintendent versus business percentages in the chart.

The largest differences of opinion pertain to (1) the relevance of activities to many curriculum areas, (2) allocations of school and business staff time to the partnership, and (3) senior management involvement.

The survey asked Superintendents about the degree to which partnerships are evaluated, and most said, "To a low degree."



INTERNAL VERSUS EXTERNAL PLANNING AND METRICS

While evaluations of partnerships are not regularly done, they are done in some cases. Themes surface in comparing Superintendent and business survey responses regarding evaluation.

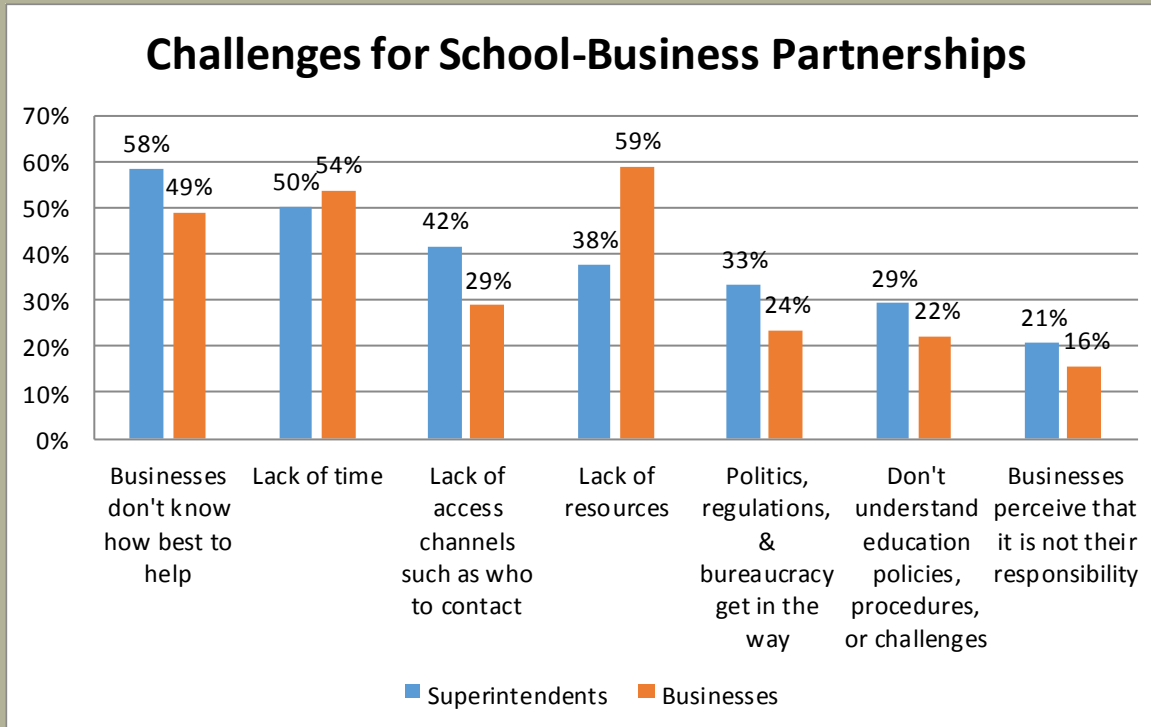
- ∇ A greater percentage of businesses report that they are conducting assessments of school-business partnerships than schools.
- ∇ In the context of a school-business relationship, an evaluation should mean “*looking at **what** you’re working on together and **how** you’re working together.*”
- ∇ Superintendents should consider that businesses may be tracking internal metrics about the partnership whether the joint partnership is measuring performance or not.
- ∇ One-sided analysis may lead to one-sided decisions, which is less than an ideal method for partnership evaluation.



RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATION

The chart below presents the challenges to school-business partnerships from both the Superintendents' and businesses' perspectives.

- ▽ The same top four challenges are identified, with both sectors identifying resource and time pressures.
- ▽ The interesting difference is that Superintendents lack access channels while businesses lack resources.
 - ▽ The last section of this report will address tools for dealing with such Superintendent challenges, such as using their alumni, parents, staff, and Chamber of Commerce as a conduit to businesses.
- ▽ Digging beneath the universal resource challenges, the first item identified in the chart points out that businesses simply don't know how best to help.



- ▽ The fact that half of the businesses don't know how to help uncovers a theme throughout each survey—the difficulty of communicating across two disparate sectors.

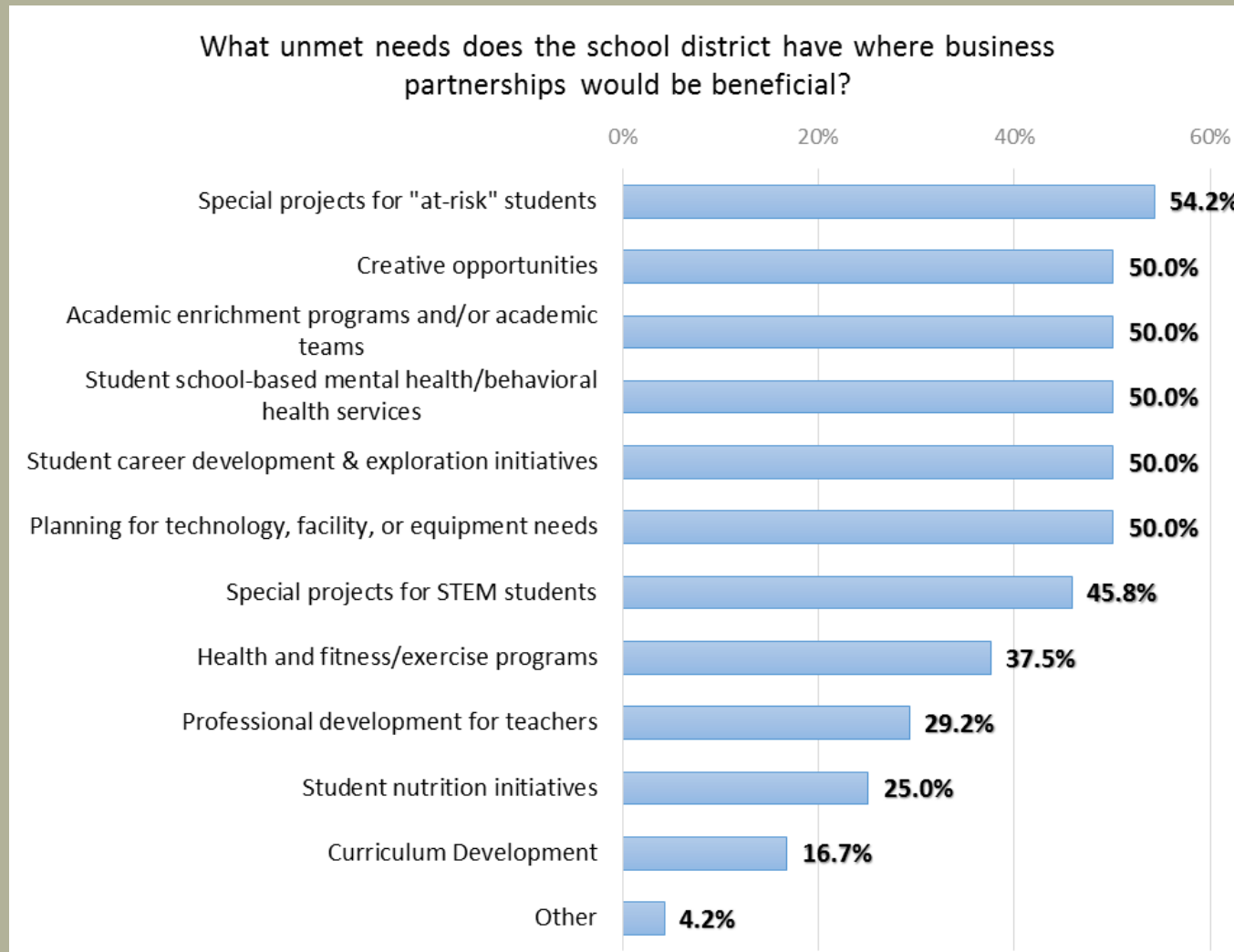
Barriers preventing businesses from supporting education...

- *“We haven’t been asked.”*
- *“Honestly, I wasn't aware that schools needed any support. Our schools removed the machine shop trade from their curriculum and we assumed that State/Federal and Levy funds took care of most of the needs. We have never been approached about the need for support.”*
- *“Businesses often aren't asked regarding the area they can best help and would be most engaged. For example, STEM activities would be of interest to us as they tie with IT; however, we are often asked to sponsor the scoreboard, yearbook, prom, etc.”*

SCHOOLS' UNMET NEEDS

Superintendents were asked to specify the unmet needs that the school districts have where business partnerships would be beneficial.

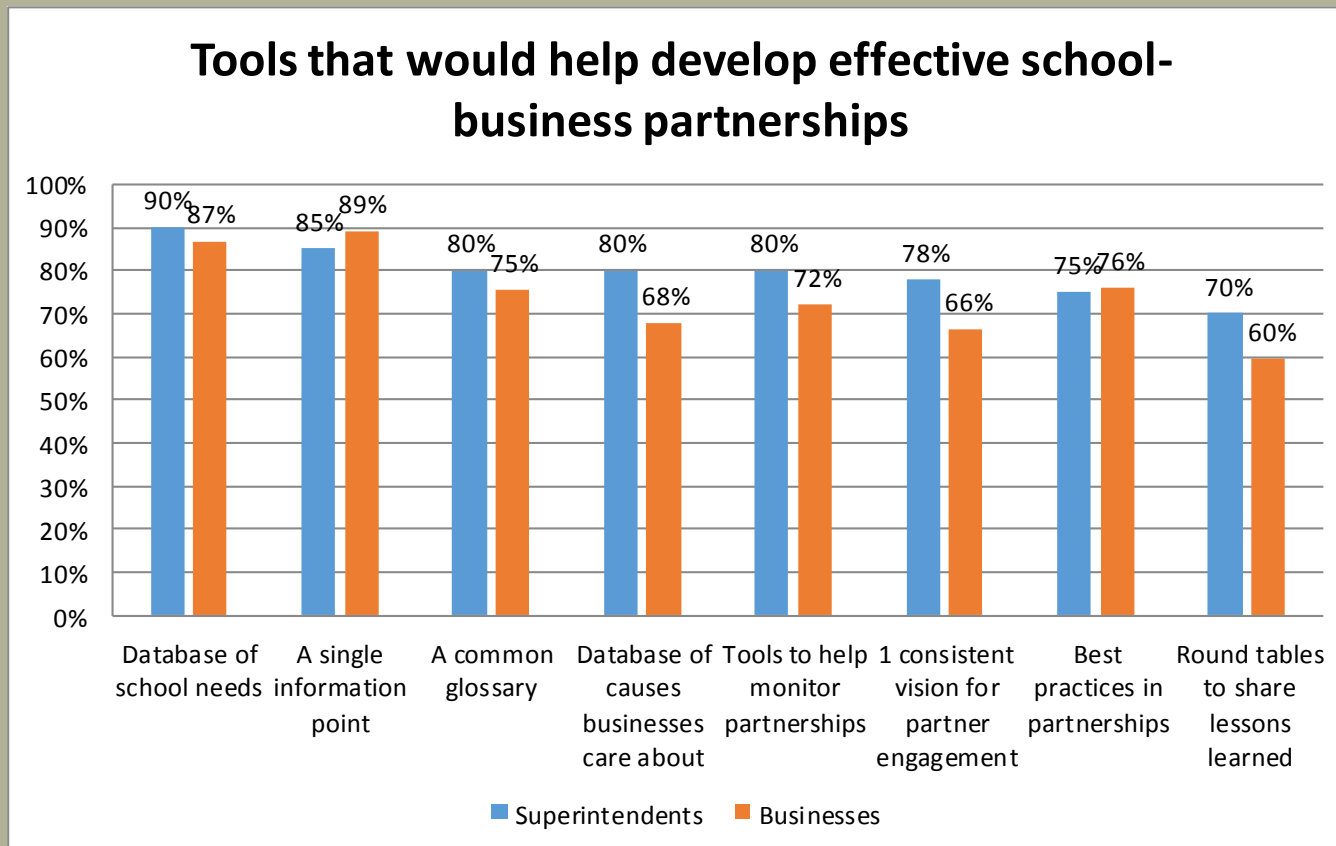
- ∇ Results show that over half of the Superintendents are in need of various types of programmatic support as well as assistance in planning for technology, facility, or equipment needs.



CONVERGENCE! SIMILAR TOOLS TO ENHANCE PARTNERSHIPS

The survey also explored tools that would help develop effective partnerships. The top answers to help overcome challenges in Central Ohio school-business partnerships are:

1. To develop a database of school needs where the schools would benefit from a business partnership
 2. To assign a single information point for advice on developing school-business partnerships.
- ∇ Those ideas stand out for both Superintendents and businesses.
 - ∇ The chart below presents widespread support for those two interventions among eight ideas that were tested in the surveys, while all eight ideas garnered majority support.
 - ∇ Noteworthy is that 87% of businesses think a database of school needs would help develop effective partnerships, while only 68% of businesses think a database of business “causes” would be helpful.



ENHANCING PARTNERSHIPS BY MATCHING SCHOOL NEEDS TO BUSINESS RESOURCES AND INTEREST

The aim of any school-business partnership is to help the school improve student achievement; and therefore, the school really needs to “go first” and articulate its needs.

The survey results demonstrate that Superintendents and businesses concur. Of course, any successful partnership requires an understanding of each partner’s needs and resources, but it begins with the schools. Different approaches are presented in the literature for how schools might communicate their needs.

One article takes into account the various resources that a business may have and presents broad categories such as:

- ▽ In-school lectures
- ▽ Work-based experiences, such as job shadowing and internships, mentors and role models for students
- ▽ Work-based experiences and mentors for teachers
- ▽ Helping the school district or school building set goals, integrate curriculum, and develop strategic plans
- ▽ Assist in meeting student needs outside of the classroom—for example, grief counseling, personal development, work-appropriate clothing, and housing
- ▽ Help securing equipment, resources, and funds
- ▽ Help with recognizing partners, parents, and colleagues and awarding merit-based scholarships
- ▽ Team training—partners can help focus and lead workshops for teachers and student leaders



Survey Summary

- ∇ The aim of every school-business partnership is to improve student achievement, and ultimately improving student achievement is done by educators.
 - ∇ Businesses can contribute to this “bottom line” in myriad ways, and some ideas have been conveyed in this report.
- ∇ For the school-business partnerships that exist, businesses are serving as a useful source of funding, equipment, and human resources; but rarely as an organizational transformation partner.
- ∇ In the short-term, strengthening school-business partnerships in Central Ohio pertains to building a stronger foundation—such as establishing a single point of information to provide advice on partnerships, and developing an electronic means of conveying school needs.
- ∇ A longer-term goal may be for schools to tap into the valuable organizational and political resources that businesses can contribute.
- ∇ These tools can serve as a catalyst for school-business partnerships across the region, but the hard and meaningful work of cultivating school-business partnerships will continue to be done town by town, school by school.



Section 2



Central Ohio Superintendents' Guide to School-Business Partnerships

Step 1: Establish Roles & Responsibilities¹

School Contributions

- ∇ The foundation for engaging businesses in partnership with schools is articulating of school needs. *More guidance on how needs may be communicated are offered in Step 2 of this guide.*
- ∇ Partnerships work best when the school designates a **Partnership Coordinator** to serve as a liaison to the partnership activities.
- ∇ This person should *maintain regular communication* with the school staff and the business partner, ensuring that everyone is consistently on the same page.
- ∇ The Coordinator should aid the principal in identifying a School Partnership Committee.
- ∇ This Committee should consist of school staff, engaged parents and administration.

Furthermore, the school should create a profile that presents its image to the public.

This profile can be used for partners, and as a public relations instrument. When compiling this profile, many persons can participate in providing the information. The profile should enable your partner to better understand your school and its needs.

A profile might include such items as:

- ∇ Special programs
- ∇ A description of the school
- ∇ The number of students, teachers and other staff

Accomplishments of the school and its students and teachers

Best Practices

What Does It Mean to Treat the Employer as a Customer?

Anyone who has set foot in a restaurant or a shop knows what makes that experience satisfying. Regardless of the cuisine or the couture, every customer wants to know one thing for sure—that whatever they need will be delivered. When customers feel special along the way, this usually helps cement the relationship and keeps them coming back for more.

It's the same for employers who are involved with educators, workforce development professionals, and government officials, says Mary Wright, senior director at Jobs for the Future, who focuses on how to better link workforce training with employer demand. "Employers need to be made to feel that they are special and paid attention to and have some sense that what they need is what's going to be provided."

Source: <http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/publications/materials/Engaging-Employers-As-Customers-050515.pdf>

¹"School-Business Toolkit: Framework and Instruments for Community Engagement," Leadership Fresno, 2005-2006.

Best Practices

Community Resources

Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) called for new approaches to traditional classroom routines and asked educators to consider alternatives to standard teaching methods.

The involvement of community resources in educational programs can add a new and existing dimension to the learning process. Students interact with adults and are provided opportunities to become productive members of their communities; adults benefit accordingly by helping students learn. Student involvement in the community provides them with the following:

- ▽ Opportunities to demonstrate competence,
- ▽ A social connection to people and to a place,
- ▽ Avenues to explore a variety of careers, and
- ▽ Enhanced self-esteem and sense of empowerment by “giving something back.”

Community members can become involved with in-school projects that will improve the quality of instruction offered to students while providing the community with the following:

- ▽ Renewal and enthusiasm;
- ▽ Opportunities to become mentors to the next generation of leaders, taxpayers, and consumers;
- ▽ Enhanced school-community good will;
- ▽ Increase level of service; and
- ▽ A vested interest in the success of local young people

Principal's Role

- ▽ Be responsible for initially meeting with business partners to ascertain mutual support services and match resources.
- ▽ Encourage a school environment that contributes to the success of all partnership programs.
- ▽ Consider new ideas, suggestions and possible changes to make the partnership successful.
- ▽ Provide adequate staffing and space for planned partnership activities.
- ▽ Stay in touch with the process and progress of the partnership.
- ▽ Confirm the school’s commitment to the partnership and the school community.
- ▽ Express approval of programmatic achievement and staff efforts.
- ▽ Recognize business leaders, both formally and informally, to encourage school and community recognition of the importance in building bridges.
- ▽ Include the business as part of the school community. Invite the business partner to meetings, assemblies, social gatherings and parent organization meetings.
- ▽ Nurture the relationship between the business and school.
- ▽ Form a School Partnership Committee, with support from the school and Partnership Coordinator, to develop an overall partnership plan.
- ▽ Provide leadership to the partnership while keeping positive momentum throughout the school in regard to any partner programs.

The School Coordinator's Role

Internal Updating and Promoting

- ∇ The school Coordinator is responsible for keeping the principal and school district informed about the partnership's progress.
- ∇ Acting as the liaison between the school and business, the Coordinator's main role is to initiate communication between the two, while promoting partnership programs throughout the greater community.
- ∇ The Coordinator aids the principal in identifying a School Partnership Committee which should consist of staff, parents and administration.

Working with the Business Partner's Contact Person to Develop Action Plans

- ∇ Similar to the school Coordinator, the business would ideally also have one point of contact for all partnership-related inquiries.
- ∇ The School Coordinator should work with the business partner's contact to better understand the business as a whole, including their business goals and needs from the partnership.
- ∇ The Coordinator should work with the business contact person to review and adjust as needed the school partnership plan.
- ∇ This plan should clearly state goals, timelines and responsibilities to ensure sustainability of the partnership.

Arranging Staff Orientation, Training, Meetings, Business Fingerprinting, Thank You notes, Recognition

- ∇ The School Coordinator should facilitate a school orientation to the partnership, with staff, parents and administration attending.
- ∇ All administrative needs should be coordinated through this person, such as: arranging meetings, business fingerprinting, writing thank you notes and administering evaluations.
- ∇ The Coordinator is also responsible for ensuring that recognition for the business partner is accomplished. This can be formal, such as an award ceremony, or informal, such as a write-up in a school newsletter.

Tracking Metrics and Regular Assessments

- ∇ The School Coordinator is responsible for tracking programming through regular assessments and/or process evaluations.
- ∇ A process evaluation assesses how well the partners have gone about their collaboration to deliver a project.
- ∇ He or she should work with the Partnership Committee to create an appropriate evaluation, and then ensure they are administered properly.
 - ∇ A simple approach could include a focus group including both the business and schools, and/or surveys.

Step 2: Aligning School and Business Resources^{2,3,4}

Identifying Business Resources

- ∇ The main goal in this step is to successfully assess the organization's resources and identify the range of contributions that can be offered to students and schools (*See Appendices A and B for ideas*).
- ∇ The organization should clearly outline their resources and define how the partnership will help achieve business goals.
- ∇ Consider the type of partnership and the level of partnership that would best meet the school's needs (i.e. – direct funding, professional development, donation of goods or services, manpower, mentoring, etc.).
- ∇ The business and school should work together to match the most important needs to the potential contributions that would make the greatest impact, always tying the partnerships back to improving student achievement.
- ∇ Use a form such as the sample in Appendix C to identify what resources businesses can bring to the table.

In another instance, the school district developed a database that presents needs by individual schools which includes:

- The school name
- Total enrollment
- A contact name/title/email
- The program area for which funding is desired
- An estimated budget
- What the school is proud of
- The challenge/area that the school district would like to improve.

The partnership will then gel when the needs of the school align with the business culture and resources.



Step 3: Identify and Approach Potential Business Partners

- ▽ Identify who the school's current business partners are. Circulate a memo to the staff asking if they have current business connections who may be interested in a partnership.
- ▽ Consider alumni and parents with business connections, as well as the Chamber of Commerce.
- ▽ Identify which businesses have something in common with your school. Commonalities will make it easier to achieve mutual goals. Approach potential business partners through an introductory letter that expresses the positive aspects of your school and a potential partnership. Follow up quickly after, and articulate your "pitch" clearly once a meeting is established. Recordkeeping is also critical to this process.
- ▽ Once a partner is identified, send a hard copy of a new partnership introductory letter (*See Appendix D for a sample*).
- ▽ An alternative may be to use an MOU or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) once the details are agreed upon (*see Appendix E for a sample*).

Step 4: Prepare an Initial Meeting with Business Partners

- ▽ Meetings should be kept at an hour maximum, to respect the business' time.
- ▽ The school should present facts, such as demographics and number of staff members in a written, clear format.
- ▽ Needs, vision and improvement goals should also be shared to ensure that everyone is on the same page.
- ▽ The school should also outline expectations for the partnership, including a timeline and any/all business deliverables. Both the business and school should agree on goals, timeline and deliverables.
- ▽ See *Appendix F for a "first meeting agenda" sample*.

Step 5: Set Clear Expectations and Clarify Activities^{5,6}

Meeting-related Communication Strategies

While having continuous communication through phone and email is important, meeting face-to-face regularly is also paramount. Meetings should not exceed one hour, and should follow an agenda. In order to respect everyone's time, an exchange of calendars is a good meeting practice.

Media-related Communication Strategies

Sending a press release to the local media detailing a new partnership can encourage future partnerships. This free press will be beneficial for the business and will also keep the community informed. Similarly, keeping the media informed of positive partnership outcomes such as a new educational incentive or program will benefit both the school and the business.

Organization-level Communication Strategies

Ensure that all staff are aware of the business partnership and subsequent programs. An easy way to keep school stakeholders apprised of updates is a weekly newsletter which can be circulated throughout the district. Compiling an email list of all stakeholders is critical in order to keep communication flowing. If appropriate, the school could also arrange a staff and business meet-and-greet.

- ▽ Provide a Partner Thank You Letter. (See *Appendix G* for a sample.)

⁵ "School-Business Toolkit: Framework and Instruments for Community Engagement," Leadership Fresno, 2005-2006.

⁶ "School-Business Partnerships, What Works? Seven Strategies for Success," Daniels Fund, 2009

⁷ "School-Business Partnerships, What Works? Seven Strategies for Success," Daniels Fund, 2009.

Step 6: Clarify the Activities to be Accomplished

Develop a Clear Work Plan

- ▽ Set clear goals with a strict timeline
- ▽ Initially agree upon responsibilities of the business versus the school
- ▽ Devise evaluation criteria
- ▽ Create a timeline for an end report

Consider Sustainability Early

Internally, a clearly defined, empowered and dedicated team is needed. Externally, constant contact between schools and businesses is paramount. Monthly meetings between the two promote open communication about what works and what doesn't work. Administering an evaluation plan aids sustainability through assessing how well the partnership is performing.

Evaluation of the business separate from the school may be useful to indicate any discrepancies that can affect long term sustainability. Additionally, the school should collaborate with the business to develop a partnership plan. This plan should clearly state goals, timelines and responsibilities to ensure sustainability of the partnership.

Steps for a Sustainable and Successful Partnership¹:

1. **Initiate:** Begin! Make the call to start the partnership
2. **Dedicate:** Make a Commitment! Find a person who is dedicated to making it work.
3. **Communicate:** The key to success! Get to know each other: needs, resources and expectations.
4. **Participate:** Getting plans on paper is not enough. Follow through and be actively involved. Encourage others to participate!
5. **Appreciate:** Be aware of all the business partner does and consistently recognize their contributions.
6. **Evaluate:** Take time to determine if goals were met.
7. **Celebrate:** Don't just work together, play together! Take pride in the partnership.
8. Once this step is met, start over!

¹Source: <http://www.palmbeachschools.org/pao/BusinessPartners/documents/SDPBCountyPartnersinEducationReferenceManualSY12-13.pdf>

Step 7: Measure for Impact^{8,9}

Establish Clear Definitions of Success

This can be accomplished through establishing clear and narrow goals. It is better to set specific goals, such as “10 students graduate X program in X time,” rather than general goals such as “Students improve through X program.” This emphasizes a numeric output and is easier to track and evaluate. Similarly, establish consensus on the expected end result and goals.

In any relationship there are multiple stakeholders. The school will need to think about the audience for its evaluation, who its stakeholders are, the information that stakeholders expect, and when they will need this information. Success may be defined differently to different stakeholders, therefore understanding their position and communicating openly is key.

For an example of how to design a simple method for data collection, please see *Appendix H*.

Report Results to All Stakeholders

Distribute an annual report to school, parents, business and other stakeholders. This report should include details on the partnership, specifics on any new programs/projects, goals, timelines and evaluation results. The school should always allow for stakeholder feedback, and use the results of this feedback to continuously improve the partnership.

All evaluations results should be reported to stakeholders, including self-assessments such as the one in *Appendix I*.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ “School-Business Toolkit: Framework and Instruments for Community Engagement,” Leadership Fresno, 2005-2006.

¹⁰ <http://www.nhachamber.com/files/568.pdf>