

SPRING 2001

Schools Can't Do It Alone

The two-way street to student success

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Raising healthy, successful children is a universal goal of all communities. Recognizing the interdependence of many components of community in achieving this goal is crucial. It is not a question of *whether* or not to work together; rather the impact we all have on children gives us no choice, except in how *best* to work together. Schools are key, of course. Their primary role in children's success is formal education, but schools also play critical roles in children's social and emotional development, and in promoting the health and safety necessary to successful learning. Schools cannot do all this alone.

For schools, families, and communities to join forces to reduce barriers to learning is a priority often cited by Connecticut's Commissioner of Education, Dr. Theodore S. Sergi. It is why he and the State Board of Education created the Department of Education's new Bureau of School-Family-Community Partnerships. The days of the little red schoolhouse serving as a community center are past. Today schools must *work* to connect with the broader community in order to ensure that every child enters school ready to learn, and that conditions are maintained so all children can learn. This bureau is working to help maximize the effectiveness of these efforts.

What can your school do for the community?

Thinking about what your school can do for the community leads to true, mutually beneficial partnerships. Does your school...

- Provide information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other resources (health screenings, blood drives), and on community activities that link to learning skills (museums, after-school and summer programs)?
- Integrate services through partnerships involving school, businesses, and civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other organizations?
- Encourage community service by students and families (see flower graphic inside), or stay open for community groups to use for events, or for others to use library, sports or computer facilities?

Remember, "community" is everyone affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in schools, and all neighborhoods that influence student learning and development should be included, not just those where students live.

Adapted from: J. Epstein (1997). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

There are many examples of change we hope to see become more common in the state. To start, although preschool is popular, many families still don't think about interacting with their local school until their child is five. Schools and families should connect much earlier in the life of each child to work together to lay a foundation for success in school and in life. Schools must take advantage of community assets to make connections with families, and help them prepare their children for school. And families must connect with schools, and take advantage of other community assets that promote learning to prepare their children for success in school.

The complexity of the issues we face requires all interdependent components of community come together to strengthen children's health, achievement and safety. Families, school systems, social and religious organizations, individuals, community groups and government agencies all have crucial roles to play supporting our children. Each benefits from success, improving the future of the entire community individually and as a whole. This issue of *Schools & Families* focuses on the important roles of the community in the work of schools. Our schools and children will achieve more with the coordinated assistance of families and the broader community.

SCHOOLS & FAMILIES

The Corporate Imperative

Businesses are learning that school involvement is a good investment. Many are in search of partnerships that will benefit their operation, productivity and profit line. Here are some arguments to persuade companies that partnering with your school is in their best interest.

- Sustaining profits in an internationally competitive economy requires a highly-qualified, competitive work force. Businesses are building their workforce, and in many cases their market, by better preparing future employees and customers.
- Partnering with schools builds company morale. Research shows happy employees are more productive.
- Employees are proud to work for a company that gives back to the community, and residents involved with schools tend to stay in a community longer, lowering turnover rates. This, combined with more skilled entry-level workers, lowers the cost of training new employees.
- Companies benefit from positive publicity and enhanced corporate image in the community and beyond.
- Better schools attract prospective job candidates in a tight labor market, and help businesses keep quality employees.
- Students feel a sense of value and of belonging to the community. This has a positive effect on behavior, lowering crime and other negative statistics that make communities unattractive to prospective employees.

For more information: The Corporate Imperative: Results and Benefits of Business Involvement in Education (1998), available free from Ed Pubs, www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html, 877-433-7827; and ENC Focus Vol. 8, No. 1 (2001) Partnerships with Business and the Community, also available free, www.enc.org, 800-621-5785.

Making the Community Connection

Developing and maintaining ongoing partnerships with community organizations and businesses is an important challenge for schools. Frequently schools approach a local restaurant for a donation of food for a particular event, or ask retailers for items to use as prizes or incentives. While relations with area businesses that meet such immediate, short-term needs are helpful, they do not fully define true partnership.

Partnerships are two-way propositions, and schools are in a position to offer help, as well as request it. Businesses have needs, and your school can help them meet their goals.

A good approach:

Identify a business in your community that you and the members of your school community frequent - a local restaurant or food store, an office supply store, a hardware store.

Invite the manager/owner to meet with your school action team, school improvement team, or other small group, to discuss mutual goals.

Look for ways to help each other. For example, for good community PR, schools can mention the business in newsletters, at PTO meetings, and in other venues. Even short term or special event volunteer opportunities can raise company morale. (See the flower graphic to the right.)

Celebrate small successes, and publicize your efforts. In a new partnership, plan small-scale activities that will yield positive results first. Special recognition and publicizing early success in a local newspaper or district newsletter will give everyone a boost and help maintain teamwork.

Build on your strengths. Once you have had success working together as partners, it is easier to sustain and expand your efforts.

United Ways, service organizations such as Rotary, and Chambers of Commerce are good places to start for help in identifying possible business partners. For other ideas, call CT Parents Plus at (860) 571-6052.

East Hartford Partnerships are Good Business

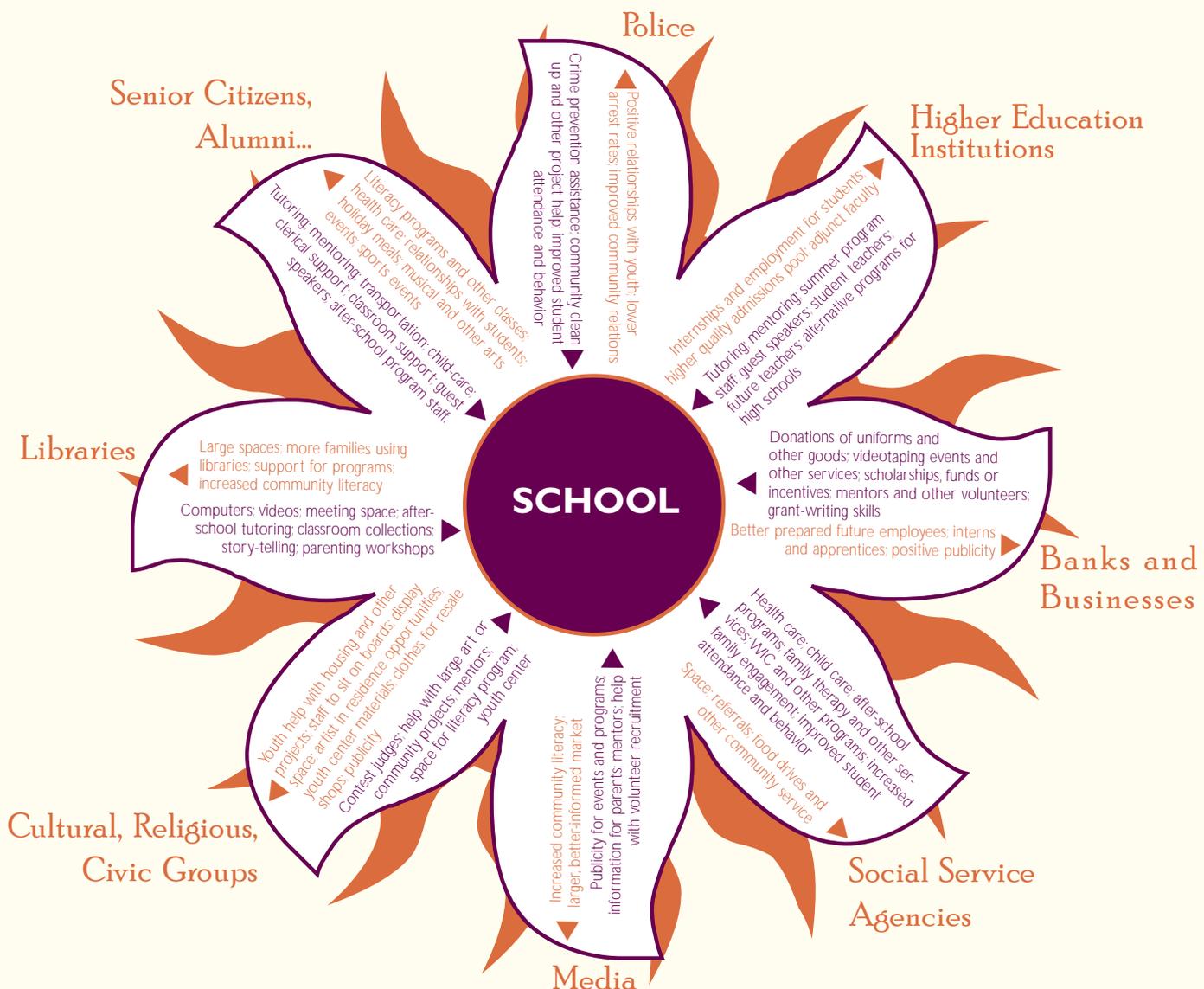
Since 1987 East Hartford Public Schools have linked with area businesses, interested individuals, and organizations through the East Hartford School-Business Partnerships Program (SBP), which helps businesses, educators and students develop mutually beneficial relationships that enhance the district's ability to educate, broaden student opportunities, and help shape future employees and customers. Set up as a tax exempt organization, SBP can accept charitable contributions to help fund activities such as a mini-grant program, incentives for academic improvement, and mentoring.

It started small – a part-time position funded by the chamber of commerce - after a retreat with the superintendent, principals, and business leaders, facilitated by the National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE). The Board of Education, impressed by the pay off, took over funding and expanded the initiative. SBP now facilitates over 300 business partners district-wide. Penny Brice, Coordinator, sees herself as a matchmaker. She matches businesses with schools, and helps develop partnerships that meet particular needs. She also prevents duplication of efforts, by fitting needs that arise at one school with existing programs. By working together as a district, businesses streamline contributions and maximize their impact.

For more information, please call the SBP at (860) 622-5102. To learn more about NAPE's Partnership Development Process, go to www.partnersineducation.org or call 703-836-4880.

Community Partnerships: Everyone Benefits

Collaborating with the community includes using community resources to strengthen schools, families, and student learning, and using school resources to benefit community partners. In true partnerships, everyone benefits. Here are just some ideas:



Resource Materials on S-F-C Partnerships Available For Loan

How Smart Schools Get and Keep Community Support. Carroll, S.R. & Carroll, D. (1994). Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service. This book was written to help public schools focus on their customers. By adapting marketing strategies, public schools can capture and retain community support without spending tax dollars.

The Administrator's Guide to School-Community Relations. Pawlas, G.E. (1995). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education. This book, written by a former high school principal, provides principals with leadership skills to develop relationships between schools and the community. Includes examples and experiences of strategies, which have been proven useful by past principals. Topics include strengthening communications, strategies for working with the media, and the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences.

The Corporate Imperative: A Business Guide for Implementing Strategic Education Partnerships. Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (2000). Washington, DC: US Department of Education. This guide is designed to assess a company's business-education partnerships, and determine the extent to which they are linked to key school business and school objectives. It is available free from ED Pubs, 1-877-433-7827 or www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html.

Be sure to visit the SERC Library to explore the extensive collection of resources related to family involvement, available for loan free of charge. Located in Middletown, the library is open to the public Monday through Saturday. Call (860) 632-1485 for directions or hours. You may also request annotated bibliographies on a variety of topics including school-family-community partnerships. The collection of books, journals, videos and other materials covers a broad spectrum of issues helpful for administrators, teachers and family members alike.



2001: International Year of Volunteers

The General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution declaring 2001 to be the International Year of Volunteers. Noting that volunteerism exists in all societies in traditional and modern forms, the declaration was made to give all communities a framework to celebrate the year in its own way, and thus to strengthen volunteerism by raising awareness and appreciation. For more information and a toolkit to use in your own celebration, go to www.iyv2001.org.

www.state.ct.us/sde/dsifscpl/index.htm

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