"Education Is Everybody's Business"

Involving business in education in Indianapolis led to improved test scores, attendance, and public confidence.
Recognizing their interdependence, the Indianapolis business community and the public schools joined together in 1979 to develop a way to combine resources and expertise to address the needs of the school system. Managed by the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, Partners in Education (PIE) was formed to help prepare students for productive lives.

After three years, results indicate the partnership is more than a good idea. Said one teacher, "My students shared an invaluable lesson in the practical side of the working world. They received basic information and a sense of worth and pride in their accomplishments."

From the business community, a chief executive officer sees it like this: "As long as our society treats our schools with indifference and places its priorities elsewhere, then the education of our youth will continue to decline. I believe Partners in Education can contribute toward reversing the downward trend."

How it Works
School-business partnerships, renewable yearly, match one school with one or more businesses and operate with the following objectives:

1. To bring business people into a school to work with students, teachers, and administrators on projects that staff members feel will be helpful and business people feel qualified to accomplish.

2. To give students and teachers a realistic picture of the business world and the preparation students need to succeed in it.

3. To supplement learning in the classroom with relevant learning experiences in business and industry.

4. To give business people an understanding of the educational system—how it works, its strengths, and its problems.

5. To give educators the same understanding of the world of business.

All partnership projects benefit both schools and businesses and are based on the expectations, resources, capabilities, and limitations of each. Partners in Education provides opportunities for businesses to:

1. Become partners in the educational development of youth: (a) Present firsthand the requirements, satisfactions, and expectations of the business world; (b) Alert teachers to the skills job applicants lack and help them develop these skills; (c) Help develop career awareness and vocational programs geared to specific local job market needs.

2. Increase the understanding of the free enterprise system among students and staff.

3. Raise the morale of administrators and teachers by demonstrating that respected "outsiders" are willing to help educate students.

4. Gain understanding of the school system, whose health is vital for the economic well-being of the metropolitan area.

5. Build support for schools among employees.
6. Become known as a community-involved company.

The program provides opportunities for schools to:

1. Gain expert assistance that might help provide a more complete education for students or management skills for teachers and administrators.

2. Understand and interact with people from the business world.


4. Acquire assistance in meeting other special needs beyond the resources of the school.

5. Become part of the economic development and decision-making process in the city.

Funding also reflects the partnership concept; monies are provided by the Indianapolis Public Schools, Corporate Community Council, Lilly Endowment, and Indianapolis Foundation. Over 100 businesses and organizations, with 500 volunteers, have been involved in the approximately 9,000 volunteer hours. The Partners in Education staff serves on 16 community advisory committees and councils in order to better link the community and the school system.

All student-related projects follow a set of criteria to avoid "activity traps." To be educationally significant, projects must give information, support or use basic skills, provide participative and experiential learning opportunities, relate directly to and be integrated within the school's curriculum, and place responsibility and accountability for learning and application on students and teachers.

Start Early

Helping students see the value of education and teaching them about the world of work should start well before high school. Therefore, businesses and civic groups are often paired with elementary schools. In one school, fifth and sixth graders became involved in manufacturing, selling, and managing a mini-corporation within their school. This project was integrated into every area of study, and at the close of the business, their efforts brought in a profit. While learning about the free market system, these students also realized the practical value of math and English.

While some program benefits are intangible, others are more concrete. Working with an architectural firm, students are transforming a neglected pond on the property of one school into a "Land for Living and Learning," to be used by both pupils and the community. Other students built a home in a historic neighborhood with the help of construction industry professionals.

Each partnership is designed to be mutually beneficial. The telephone company assisted advanced computer students in the world of programming problems. In return, students processed telephone bills, enabling these future customers to understand the inner workings of the company.

On the lighter side, a large pharmaceutical company's employees were entertained by the partnering school's choir during picnics and seasonal programs, and vacant walls were used to display student artwork.

Through special projects, laid-off teachers have identified alternative careers and found job search assistance. Administrators have received management training, and the school board has used business and community leaders' expertise regarding school closings, governance training for board members, and a strategic planning process for the school corporation.

Some schools have as many as 21 projects in operation within the partnership, during the school year, targeting such needs as:

- Improving attendance
- Acquiring real-world work attitudes, expectations, and responsibilities
- Developing job seeking and keeping skills
- Understanding application of academics to the work place
- Decreasing the number of dropouts
- Reducing drug and alcohol abuse
- Raising student aspirations
- Identifying career opportunities
- Gaining marketable work, communication, social, and problem-solving skills
- Encouraging mentoring and one-on-one relationships
- Creating challenges for the gifted and talented
- Enhancing good citizenship and much more.

Significant Results

Results are essential. Although each partnership can show results in meeting specific objectives, three significant and overriding themes emerge:

1. Raising Students' Test Scores

Said one principal of a school with a significant increase in scores, "Partners in Education provided a wide variety of experiences that otherwise would not have been available. These experiences increased the broad field of knowledge students were able to bring to their standardized curriculum and, specifically, to the Iowa test."

2. Increasing Attendance and Reducing Tardiness

Another principal states, "We have seen many of these students change their attitudes toward school, toward classmates, and toward the community because of the business leaders' involvement. These changes in attitude have been demonstrated by improved..."
attendance, a reduction in referrals to
the office for discipline, and, very much
appreciated, better manners when deal-
ing with adults.

3. Meeting the School's Curriculum
Objectives. Said one science department
chairperson: “Fifteen out of 17 perform-
ance objectives were met by our school.
The other high schools averaged about
three out of 17. The Partners in Educa-
tion program influenced our success
greatly because the partnering activities
supported the objectives and brought
additional reinforcement to what was
being taught.” And a student commented,
“I spent four years at school in data
processing and computer programming,
so I thought I knew it all. My experience
in this program made me realize how
much more training I need, how much
more I have to learn.”

In addition, bringing people into the
schools increases public confidence.
They better understand the schools’
strengths and weaknesses and become
credible outside sources with local me-
dia. Upon completion of a project, one
businessman commented: “I had some
prejudices against our schools, and I
think a lot of the others had the same
feeling. This experience has been good
for me. I gained great respect for the
school system.” That can only mean
payoffs when it comes to financing the
public schools.

For these projects to be successful,
several major principles must under-
score the partnership concept. It is im-
portant that both parties, school and
business, understand prior to imple-
dentation that the business partner be
viewed as an important part of the
school, that a system for information-
sharing be developed, and that pairings
be based on matching school and busi-
ness needs with available resources. The
participants must always avoid using the
relationship for publicity purposes or as
a recruitment scheme and must not
make promises they can't keep.

Most important, business people have
to recognize that the educator will
maintain the sole authority in the class-
room and carry the responsibility for
curriculum design, discipline, and goal
attainment. On the other hand, educa-
tors need to recognize that the business
volunteers are an essential component
in the planning and implementation
process.

The development of a partnership is
complex. To clarify the process, five
major stages have been identified:

1. Initial design and coordination.
The role of the Partners in Education and
the school administrative staff in
development of the partnerships.

2. Delineation of institutional roles.
The identification of needs and re-
sources, as viewed by each partner. Task
forces from both business and school
coordinate planning and future imple-
mentation.

3. Matching of needs with resources.
The establishment of a dialogue be-
tween the partners to clarify program
purpose. A step-by-step procedure de-
velops this relationship.

4. Development and implementation
of programs. The translation of program
needs into tangible projects, as defined
by teachers and business resources. This
includes an evaluation component for
each objective.

5. Establishment of support/commu-
nication networks. Up to a point, the
Partners in Education staff's role is pri-
marily that of initiator of the partnership
concept. This role shifts to one of a
provider of technical assistance when
and where needed.

Training workshops for all individuals
involved, materials consisting of pro-
gram ideas and guidelines for success,
and a process for parent and student
input are also important. And evalua-
tion should take place informally at
every step of the process, with a com-
plete evaluation at the end of each
school year. Based on the results of
these evaluations, the partnership plan-
ning process begins again—priorities arc
redefined and new objectives set.

Partners in Education exemplifies cit-
zizens of the business and education
communities volunteering their time,
energies, and expertise to improve the
quality of life in their city. Does it work?
We think so, and so does the governor
of Indiana. Chosen as a model program,
Partners in Education was recognized
by the Governor's Conference on Cit-
izen Participation in two categories: the
overall program concept and the plan-
ning process. In addition, Partners in
Education won the Governor's Award
for outstanding overall community im-
 pact. The program works because it
makes education “everybody's busi-
ness.” EL