Partners in Education: An Old Tradition Renamed

Partnerships between businesses and schools can benefit both parties.

"Today, education partnerships—cooperative efforts between a school and the private sector to improve the quality of education—are truly a national movement permeating the entire education system." So says America's Schools: Everybody's Business, a report published by the U.S. Department of Education in November 1988. The report goes on to describe these partnerships, which exist in urban, rural, and suburban areas, in elementary, middle, and high schools.

What the report does not say is that partnerships in education are not new. As far back as 1956, directors of school volunteer programs were placing lay citizens in the classroom to tutor children in reading and to work with children whose native language was not English. These organized efforts to recruit, train, and place volunteers began in New York City with a grant from the Ford Foundation to the Public Education Association, a citizen advocacy group. In 1964, the Association received another grant to replicate the program in 20 large cities, using the methods that had proven successful in New York.

In the late 1950s and 1960s these volunteers were primarily mothers. During the 1970s, with more women entering the job market and heading households, directors of volunteer programs began to recruit older Americans, retirees, college students, and men and women from local businesses. In 1982, there were 4.3 million citizens providing volunteer services on a regular basis. Of these 4.3 million, 18 percent were business employees.

Partnerships Today
The early volunteer efforts were the forerunners of what is known today as the “partnership movement.” Since 1983, the number of schools reporting partnerships has risen from 17 to 40 percent of all schools. Today there are more than 140,800 education part-
Partnerships operating in the nation's schools, and the number is still growing.

Partners range from individuals or small companies to large multinational corporations or government agencies. Just over half of all partnerships reported in 1987-88 were sponsored by the private sector. These partners include banks, fast-food restaurants, insurance companies, bakeries, law firms, dry cleaners, professional basketball teams, publishing companies, labor unions, automobile manufacturers, oil companies, civic and service clubs, and many individual volunteers.

The structure of partnerships is also varied: one school and one partner, one partner nationwide, a group of partners communitywide, or a group of partners nationwide. The most common form of partnership is probably the use of volunteers from corporations who serve in classrooms under the supervision of paid staff. The goals of partnership programs include everything from reinforcing classroom instruction to improving employability skills, preventing drug abuse, providing internships for teachers, and providing summer employment opportunities for gifted or at-risk youth.

The National Role
Although partnerships in education have primarily been locally driven, there has been some national influence. In June 1984, the President's Advisory Council on Private Sector Initiatives sponsored the first National Symposium on Partnerships in Education. Approximately 200 educators and businesspeople attended the Symposium, at which local program directors conducted nuts-and-bolts workshops on how to start and maintain partnerships. By the time of the third symposium in 1986, attendance had almost quadrupled, and participants represented 42 states and Canada. With the end of the Reagan administration, the symposium was institutionalized under the umbrella of the newly formed National Association of Partners in Education. The new association was the result of a merger in November 1988 between the National School Volunteer Program and the National Symposium on Partnerships in Education.

Levels of Partnership
In America today, private sector partnerships and business involvement aimed at improving the educational system operate at a number of levels. The National Alliance of Business (NAB) defines these levels as follows:

**Level 1. Policy.** Policy partnerships are collaborative efforts among businesses, schools, and public officials that shape the public and political debate about schools, bring about substantive changes in legislation or governance, and affect the overall direction.
Project TEACH: How Business Helps Our Schools

Hilary G. Cowan

"Teaching is not as easy as I'd thought. My wife used to come home exhausted, and I couldn't imagine why—all she did was sit behind a desk all day. Wrong!"

These are the words of an enlightened husband who participated in Project TEACH, a program to place volunteers in classrooms. Now in its second year, this ambitious project reaches out to the 74 elementary and 3 special education schools in Kanawha County, West Virginia.

Project TEACH began as the result of a shortage of funds for training. In spring 1987, the Kanawha County Board of Education initiated a four-year plan to place computers in its elementary schools and to provide elementary teachers with computer training; however, the board could not provide enough money for substitutes to allow released-time training. John Chapman, president of the local chamber of commerce, suggested staffing classrooms temporarily with volunteers, and Project TEACH emerged.

The members of the committee that organized Project TEACH were concerned that the logistics of the program might prove overwhelming. Annually, a total of 700 three-hour time slots would have to be filled by volunteers from the community. The legal question of supervision in the classroom also caused concern. Volunteers are not certified to teach, so either two classes must be combined and taught by an Assisting Teacher and a volunteer, or someone in a supervisory capacity must stay with the volunteer. Neither alternative is problem-free, but most school staffs have found ways to make them work.

We established a Project TEACH Lesson Planning Committee, which decided that all volunteers would be asked to create a three-hour lesson plan. Talented teachers and business volunteers worked with Jane Hange, Director of Classroom Instruction at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, to put together a Project TEACH kit, which included information on child development, sample lesson plans, and suggested short activities. The Lesson Planning Committee also created a three-hour inservice session to prepare volunteers for teaching by allaying their fears, modeling good teaching practices, and introducing the kit materials.

After we received a start-up grant from a local foundation, a part-time coordinator, Marietta Crews, was hired to help orchestrate the project. In July we held a kick-off breakfast for CEOs from large companies. We asked local businesses and community members to contribute money, or time in the form of in-class visits or field trips. Within one month, 268 three-hour time slots had been filled by 42 local businesses.

By the end of the first year, more than 80 area businesses had contributed thousands of hours of volunteer time to release teachers for computer training. Many local businesses had helped to pay project expenses, and the DuPont Corporation had created a videotape of Project TEACH to be used in training and recruitment. During the 1988–89 school year, local officials, university students, and more than 90 businesses participated in the project.

Project TEACH has been successful because we have carefully managed the logistics. Juggling over 600 volunteers from 90 businesses with 350 teachers in 76 schools is no simple matter. Effective communication can be a daily problem. For this reason, a secretary was added to the project staff during the second year.

Project TEACH has grown well beyond its original purpose of meeting an existing financial need. To date, at least 10,000 students in kindergarten through grade 6 have participated in classroom activities with Project TEACH volunteers. Lesson plans have included writing checks, filling out job applications, working cash registers, tutoring chemical plants—the list includes hundreds of experiences that may influence career decisions and will surely be remembered by students long after they leave school. Together, Kanawha County citizens are creating a new understanding of what education means to the community and what the community means to education.

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To acquaint students with their business, Security Pacific National Bank has sponsored entry-level job skills training for students throughout California.

Level 4. Partners in Teacher Training and Development. Businesses involved in teacher and counselor training and professional development provide opportunities to update, upgrade, or maintain skills, or to learn more about the labor market in the community. For example, the University of Washington's Ford Fellows Science/Mathematics Project, funded by the Ford Motor Company, links industry, teachers, and the university to integrate work experiences in science and mathematics with academic study and leadership training. The goal of this partnership is to produce individuals with graduate degrees who have a solid background in science or mathematics, insight into the competitive environment of industry, and a commitment to teaching in the public schools.

Level 5. Partners in the Classroom. Classroom partners are volunteers who bring their business or occupational expertise directly into the classroom or bring the classroom to the business. For example, the Federal City Council, in cooperation with the District of Columbia Public Schools, has recruited and placed scientists, mathematicians, and engineers as visiting teachers, tutors, and mentors.

To acquaint students with their business, Security Pacific National Bank has sponsored entry-level job skills training for students throughout California. Each year, in partnership with over 200 school districts, more than 4,500 students are trained in Security Pacific's offices. Security Pacific provides supplies and equipment, free use of training facilities, and an employee as the teacher.

Early Intervention Business-education partnerships are primarily addressing educational and not vocational problems. That is to say, corporations are not forming partnerships with schools in a direct effort to train future employees to perform specific tasks. For the most part, business is interested in helping schools provide a sound general education that fosters literacy, mathematics skills, and problem-solving abilities.

Nevertheless, business interest in the schools is definitely self-serving—and it should be. Altruism aside, the bottom line for business is productivity at a cost commensurate with competition, both national and international. Just as educators have found that early intervention programs such as Head Start yield the highest return, so is business finding that early intervention for future employees is the most productive. The Security Pacific Bank partnership described above is a good example of a major corporation's taking steps to ensure a future work force while reducing costs of inservice education and training for employees.

But besides well-educated workers, these partnership programs provide an avenue of entrance to the schools for both business and the community. And as businesses and communities, through their participation, learn more about the problems facing schools today, they can use their political influence to shape public policy to solve those problems.

1 According to a survey conducted by the School Management Study Group (SMSG) of Salt Lake City, Utah, and the National School Volunteer Program, as reported in the 1983 Annual Report of the National School Volunteer Program, Inc., Alexandria, Va., p. 19.
3 Ibid.
4 In The Fourth R, Workforce Readiness, the 1987 Executive Summary of the National Alliance of Business.

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