

Building the Partnership Pyramid

Finding a new way to talk about partnership activity

Schools, districts, and their community partners talk about partnerships as a single, “catch-all” category, when in reality the level of support and types of commitment they receive from various groups can vary tremendously. We call local citizens our partners when they vote for school bonds, and use the same term when referring to the local chamber that contributes thousands of dollars and volunteer hours to our system. While any support is appreciated, of course, using a single term can hinder our thinking on the subject; it can also limit what people may contribute when we ask them to partner with us.

When asking the question, “what does it mean to be a partner?”, it may help to consider that there are several possible levels of partnering. Defining these different levels may help in targeting partnership opportunities and in talking with members of your community about how they can contribute to K-12 education in your area.

Level I: Foundational Community Support

At the most fundamental level, everyone in a school’s service area is a stakeholder, whether they are a parent, community leader, or a taxpayer. Their positive attitudes on, and behaviors toward, area schools can be considered as a basic type of support.

Examples of partners at this level would include community members who hold favorable attitudes of local schools; decide to enroll their children in those schools; vote for school bond issuances; and speak favorably about the schools or district, both privately and publicly.

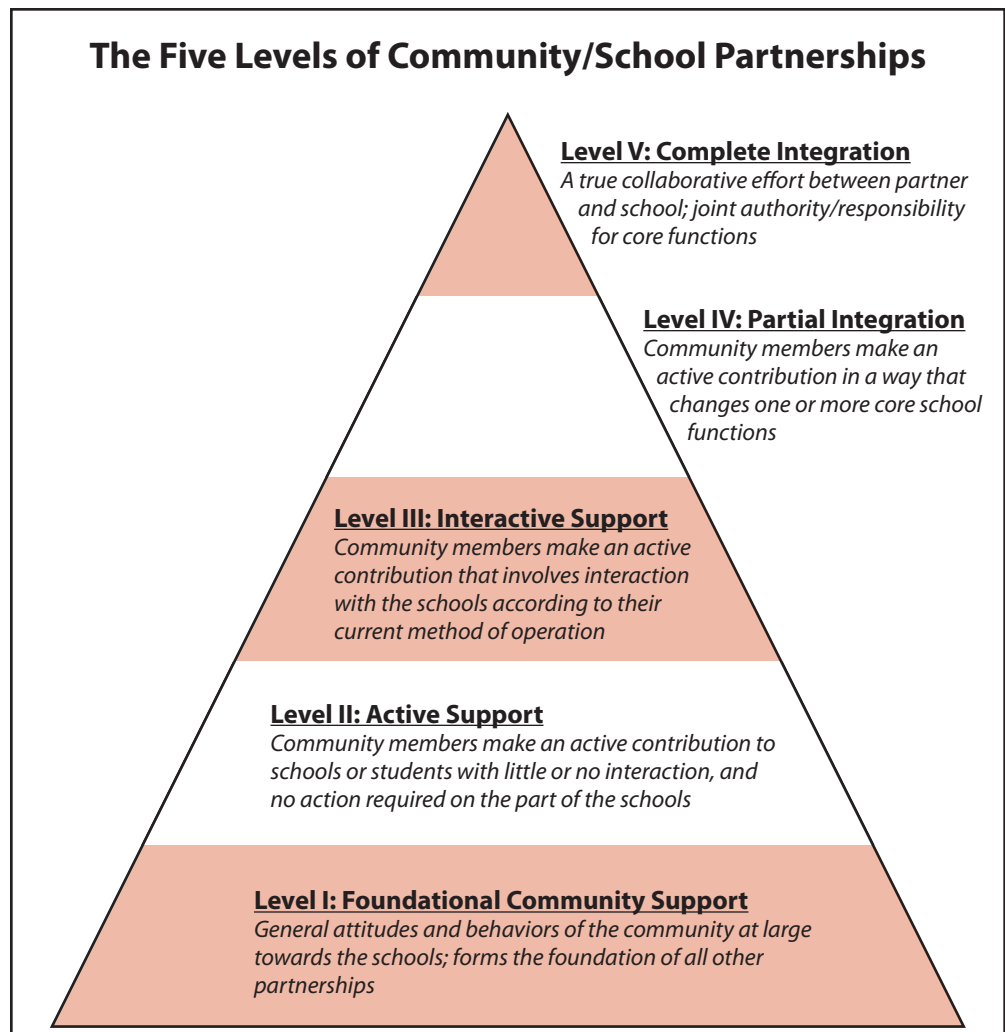
A supportive community is an essential foundation for the other, more active types of partnerships found higher on the pyramid at right. If there is little or no goodwill among the community, it will be much more difficult to establish a broad base of active partnerships with individual stakeholders or groups.

Level II: Active Support

The next level up consists of active support from community members and individual stakeholders or groups. At this level, people make an active contribution to their area schools, but they do so in such a way that they have little or no contact with students, teachers, or administrators, and their work does not change the existing operations of the school in material ways.

There are many examples of this type of support:

- Individuals or businesses donating to support an extracurricular function, such as underwriting the cost of band uniforms or athletic equipment
- Members of a civic organization, or groups of employees, volunteering to clean up the school grounds on a designated volunteer day
- A local food bank managing a weekend backpack program for students in high-poverty areas
- Businesses donating used equipment to a career/technical education program



- Individuals or businesses donating prizes for raffles or student contests
- A local restaurant offering free food for an event or an off-site meeting room

In each of these examples, there is little or no direct interaction with students or staff, and they do not affect standard school operations. But that doesn't mean that these types of partnerships are not important: they either improve the quality or richness of students' educational experience or allow the district to forego expenses they might otherwise incur.

Level III: Interactive Support

At the third level, stakeholder partnerships are active and interactive activities. They commonly place partners in direct contact with students and staff, and often tie directly to academic or other measured outcomes such as postsecondary planning or dropout prevention.

Examples of Level III partnerships include:

- Members of a local chamber hosting a career day or visiting classes to talk about their industries
- A local business establishes a mentoring program or student internship initiative
- A business/education coalition creates a summer externship program for teachers, exposing them to current practices in their field
- A civic organization commits to a regular reading program with a specific classroom
- An organization adopts a school and helps the administration meet identified needs

Partners at this level are generally working to help students and schools to achieve goals that are already in place, and their efforts are supplemental to the core learning experience. While such partnerships can produce significant benefits for students, they do not change the way schools operate academically or operationally.

Level IV: Partial Integration

At the next level, partners take on a more equal role with their school, acting as much like a collaborator as a supporter. This entails a greater commitment and level of responsibility on the part of the community partner.

Individual examples of these kinds of partnerships include:

- A committee of high-level business executives working with the Montgomery County Business Roundtable for Education partnered with the Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools to analyze current district operations in targeted areas and recommend efficiencies, ultimately saving the district hundreds of thousands of dollars each year

- Simon Property Group, a property manager overseeing malls across the country, works with 24 districts in 12 states to host alternative learning school sites within their properties at no cost to their partner district
- The Gowan Company worked with the Crane School District in Yuma, AZ to build a science/math program for advanced students, paying for teacher salaries, technology, curriculum, and supplemental resources

In each of these examples, the school district was open to changing some element of its operation, whether it involved a new school site, existing district operations, or creation of a new academic strand, and worked with their partner as a collaborator to make that happen. In each case, this resulted in dramatic and positive results for the participating district.

Level V: Complete Integration

Complete Integration represents situations where schools and their stakeholders become true partners, working together to define the purpose of education, collaboratively determining how to achieve those goals, and sharing the responsibility and authority to make it all happen. One of the few examples available would be the academies of the National Academy Foundation, which use customized, career-specific curricula and rely on local businesspeople for significant portions of the learning process.

It is important to remember that all partnerships are important, no matter the size or scope. But hopefully by identifying the different types of partnerships and talking with partners and colleagues in these terms, we can think about new ways to engage stakeholders and fully utilize their contributions for the benefit of our students.

New lower bulk rates on subscriptions to KPR!

If you'd like to order multiple subscriptions of *KPR*, we offer discounts based on the number of subscriptions ordered:

First subscription:	\$99/year
Next 3 subscriptions:	\$59.40/year (40% discount)
Next 5 subscriptions:	\$29.70/year (70% discount)
Next 40 subscriptions:	\$14.85/year (85% discount)
Beyond that:	\$9.90/year (90% discount)

Put this information in the hands of those who need it to see a large cumulative impact in local community/school relations. Contact us to arrange your order:

Brett Pawlowski • 704-717-2864
Brett@dehavillandassociates.com