

# K-12 Partnership Report

## Building a Statewide Partnership Association

*Lessons from the 80s with insights for today*

Fifteen years ago, almost every state had some kind of partnership association; today, there are just a handful in existence. For those who would like to rekindle such an organization in their part of the country, the following strategies may give you some ideas for moving forward.

The opportunities outlined here are from our work in the 1980s to build the Florida Association of Partners in Education (FAPE). Of course, what you see below occurred when times were different and money was bountiful, allowing us to pay for people's travel to come learn about a "magic genie" called education partnerships and move more quickly in a hundred other ways. But even in this more challenging environment, there may be some things here that trigger an idea or two for you.

Here are the strategies that led to a strong statewide network of successful business partnerships. Underlying all of this work was a significant amount of political support: in Florida's era of developing a statewide network of organized district partnerships, we had a dedicated department of education (DOE) office, and the governor and the legislature got on board.

The items listed here are in historical order. The steps relate to you. The narrative relates to Florida.

### **Step 1: Recruit a National Partner to Sponsor a Specific Strategy or Creative Academic Program and Make it Available to Target States or School Districts**

Partnerships are a big deal in this state, from Aubrey's, a small grocery store across the road from a rural elementary school, to the US Navy, universities, Washington Mutual, and more. In the early 80's, the DOE took a leadership role and started by recruiting big partners who would underwrite the cost of creative academic programs, invented to carry their name and provide oceans of PR. These became Velcro for the

partnership concept and a great boost for involving the community in student learning. Book-it by Pizza Hut, Chevron's Senior Mentors for Creative Students, Saturday Scholars from the Navy, and Exxon's Science Kit for high schools are just a few examples. Handbooks, training and recognition were supported by the businesses and had statewide presence.

### **Step 2: Host Regional "By Invitation Only, All Expenses Paid" Partnership Development Training**

Today, all Florida districts utilize a vast array of partnerships. This was not true prior to the '80's. Community support mostly consisted of booster contributions. Partnerships began to be formalized and focused on improving student learning in the mid '80's when we, at the DOE, got a grant and did a "by invitation only, all expenses paid" training (seduction). We invited nine small districts to the training: they were selected because they did not already have a formalized process in place for identifying, recruiting, training, and retaining community partners, nor were they particularly interested in such an invasive idea at the time.

Each district was to bring a three-person team, including the superintendent, a principal, and a businessperson. We selected a small, centrally located resort in Crystal River with fishing and golf opportunities, invited an expert trainer from the National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE), and spent two days, eight hours each day, in intense training and plan development. (Golf and fishing were a faux lure.) Each district developed its own plan – a huge accomplishment. On the third day, each team presented its implementation plan.

It worked like a charm. Those who attended developed amazing programs at home, and not only did they become aunts and uncles to the project, but they also became the nucleus for the beginning of a statewide partnership network. These teams were poster districts for strong partnership programs. From there, we continued by having the teams do workshops at state superintendent, school board, and community involvement conferences. They also became mentors for startup districts. Training the trainers gave great mileage

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and lowered costs; in addition, the “aunts and uncles” to the project were fantastic allies and talked up the concept among their peers.

### **Step 3: Establish a Formal Contact List of Business Partnership Coordinators**

Next, DOE asked each school district to identify a Business Partnership Coordinator, establishing an identified communication network for training, recognition, and sharing ideas. We also organized the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations (67 school districts, eventually 67 members). They met annually at the FAPE Conference and their board had monthly conference call meetings hosted by the DOE. This idea built great esprit de corps among the foundation directors and had huge power. Their stature in the state and legislative success has worked well.

### **Step 4: Host a Statewide School Business Partnership Conference at a Great Site**

To get the program off the ground and establish statewide participation, advocacy, and sharing, we hosted annual conferences specific to business partnerships. In addition to the agendas, the sites were very attractive: Disney, Long Boat Key in Sarasota, Universal Studios. (When I first went to DOE, a veteran taught me that if you are going to ask people to come to a meeting, work, pay their own expenses, and return home to a full desk, take them to a resort.) Registrations poured in. Business people had not participated in an education conference before. Most had school aged children themselves and reveled in direct access to making a difference.

### **Step 5: Showcase Successful Partnerships through a Recognition Program**

One of the biggest contributors to our success and statewide visibility is the fact that every year for at least 20 years we have done a black tie Commissioner’s Business Partnership Awards event, often at Disney or Universal (partners). We select winners from each of Florida’s five reporting areas featuring small, medium, and large districts. This is another enjoyable strategy to get the leaders together, sharing ideas and advocating for partnerships.

### **Step 6: Publish Success Stories and Distribute Through the Rural Education Association and Other Channels**

The winning activities from the Commissioner’s Business Partnership Awards are published and made available to districts as models they can replicate. I highlight the rural network because they need the most help. Large markets like Miami have all the businesses and political leaders they could ever want and have the wherewithal to recruit, train and recognize; small

markets have a bigger challenge. However, many small markets have found great success for their business partnership programs too, particularly when they get going through a statewide program like our Senior Mentors for Creative Students. Vernon was an example of this. Receiving training on possibilities in a rural area, they identified Sunny Hills Retirement Subdivision among other possible partnerships. Set back in the woods, near Vernon Elementary, is a retirement subdivision with houses owned by national celebrities and other successful business people who became creative mentors for talented Vernon elementary students. It was particularly popular because the goal was to mentor for the purpose of developing creative skills. One such mentor was the creator of the Campbell’s soup label. This attractive program served as a hook to open thinking of possibilities and, today, little Vernon has one of the state’s strongest school/ business partnership programs per capita. In addition, the speaker pro tem for the Florida House of Representatives was from Vernon. Through the enthusiasm generated in this small community for partnerships, he was one of the greatest advocates the Florida Partnership Program has had in the legislature, successfully legislating funding, policy, and promotion.

### **Step 7: Recruit a Major Business Partner and/or Congressman**

Businesses and congressmen love the opportunity to make a difference in student learning. Congressmen are looking for a bill opportunity that will give them a legacy. In Florida’s case we had Senator Bob Graham who attached funding for organized partnership programs to a train moving through Congress. Ted Kennedy is another example. His legislation, the National Youth and

## **K-12 Partnership** *Report*

Brett Pawlowski  
Editor and Publisher

The *K-12 Partnership Report* is the newsletter of record for anyone involved in connecting schools and their communities, including K-12 partnership practitioners, school foundation directors, and the business and community leaders who work to improve students’ lives and help to prepare them for the college and career opportunities that lie ahead. It is published 10 times per year (monthly except June and December) by DeHavilland Associates, 10101 Lampkin Way, Charlotte NC 28269. Phone 704.717.2864; email [brett@DeHavillandAssociates.com](mailto:brett@DeHavillandAssociates.com).

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Community Service Act (to which Graham attached his volunteer legislation) became one of his greatest legacies. He was a longtime mentor in “Everybody Wins”, a program in which business and government folks went to a Washington school to have lunch and read to a student. Bush I, with his Points of Light initiative, was another boost; they recently had a special on TV honoring him for this program. Former presidents were there, and when Bill Clinton went on stage he said the only thing Bush 1 said to him in the transition was, “Please keep Points of Light.” When Bush 2 came on stage, he said Clinton, in the transition, said only, “Please keep Americorps.” All this is to say, volunteerism and partnerships supersede all other accomplishments for politicians. There is one out there that would love to sponsor, legislatively and financially your program.

Public employees and their associations are the wrong targets for this kind of support, simply because they don’t have any money to give away. Focus on an initiative and write a grant; hook on to someone who has a grant or recruit a business. When the big legislative train starts rolling through your state legislature, there is always some fine print nobody notices and the right person at the right place can slide it in. It might be a million dollars to improve student learning through the formation of partnerships. Your DOE might help you, too. Here, again, your board would be worth a pound of gold to do your leg work.

### Takeaways

What I have shared with you are successes when money was bountiful and travel was not an issue; businesses were doing well and were easy to recruit to improve education. Times are different now of course. (That said, when FAPE needs to develop training, we still have success getting associations, businesses and grants to underwrite the cost because it is such a necessary component for safe, satisfying volunteer experiences. Education improvement is an easy sell.) A few tips for operating in today’s environment follow.

### Start Small

A board of people with clout is a huge help. Start with public relations coordinators from major businesses that have money and/or need to improve their image; a handful of district leaders; a state congressional advocate or one or two of their staff members, local district partnership coordinators, maybe some education foundation directors could be huge in promoting/formalizing a network and training opportunity. People are honored to be on a board and, again, become aunts and uncles to your project.

### History of NAPE’s Beginning is a Good Format to Copy

When NAPE was trying to expand its effort to

recruit states to join the national network as NAPERs , they invited 10-15 state leaders to Washington and gave each the challenge of bringing in one other state. I chose Georgia and that was an easy sell. One on one contact by a practitioner rather than “someone from Washington” was priceless. Try this same approach at the state level: “bring a friend” models can work great.

### As You Look for Financial Resources

You will be faced with, I would guess, what we were faced with in Florida. The districts wanted the state services, but did not want to share their partners, nor contribute any money. So we learned to pursue business support instead, and saw that the Exxons, Chevrons, and Washington Mutuals, as examples, had enough money and motivation to go around. I have found the easiest businesses to recruit in Florida are those with environment issues, i.e. the oil companies with offshore drilling aspirations or oil spills to overcome; companies in the Everglades; and the list goes on, limited only by imagination and failure to keep up with news headlines. Turning a black hat into a white hat is on the top of their list. What greater goal can a business have than to improve learning opportunities for children?

*Pam Lastowski is the Executive Director of the Florida Association of Partners in Education (FAPE).*

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# Mid-Year Resolutions

Another school year is ending—and a new school year, very different from the last, will begin in just a few short months. I say “different” because, while many districts have felt the effect of budget cuts already, those effects were muted thanks to \$100 billion in support that schools received over the past two years from the federal stimulus program. Those funds have now been depleted, and the 2011-12 school year will go forward without any such supplemental support. Deeper cuts are almost a certainty in most markets.

However, despite having less money to work with, we still have a job to do: namely, to give every child a great education. And logic dictates that you can't cut your way to improved outcomes. The only solution, therefore, is to find other resources to supplement your efforts. That's why partnerships are about to become one of the most important subjects in education today.

As a partnership leader, you know all of this already; but what you may not know (and what we're all trying to figure out) is how to take your partnership efforts to the next level. We need to take partnership efforts to scale, building many more partnerships with much greater investments and much greater measurable outcomes.

A few ideas on how to do that—along with some resolutions to make as we prepare for the coming school year:

## Connect

One of the single most powerful things you can do is to connect with others in the field. By building a network of contacts you'll learn about effective strategies, discover new partnership models, swap recruiting methods, and have a support group to commiserate with. If you don't have a statewide network already, this month's feature article gives you some strategies for starting one; but even if you don't have the ability to launch a statewide group, resolve to look for others in your district and in surrounding markets to build your own support group.

## Recruit

Recruiting partners is critically important, and it's a job that's never really done. Resolve to make contacts every week, and realize that internal partners are just as important as external partners. Superintendents are one of your most important prospects, and a group that's often overlooked: we assume we have their support, so we never really lay out a case to get them involved. As a result, many pay “lip service” to community support but never get fully on board and take a leadership role in making partnerships happen.

To help you make that case, keep an eye out for a new survey effort taking place in a couple of weeks: we'll be surveying district partnership directors on the types of partnerships they oversee, the value they generate, and the outcomes that they produce. The report from this survey (which will be free to all, and excerpted here in the newsletter) will be an invaluable recruiting tool.

## Inform

Finally, resolve to educate all your partners, internal and external, on the principles of partnership design and maintenance. Remember that the *K-12 Partnership Report* is now free; if you have a group of partners, administrators, or chamber members, we'd be happy to add them to the subscription list so they can get *KPR* each month and learn about effective strategies and innovative models. My contact information is below.

Best wishes for a new school year -

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# Three Keys to Building Strong Partnerships

*Doing the right things up front to ensure a strong partnership effort*

Today more than ever, providing access to cutting edge educational opportunities for all students requires a commitment from all of us. During this time of budget shortfalls and academically failing schools, leaders must find new sources of support and new ways of doing things. It is essential that educators and businesspeople alike embrace partnerships as a viable option to building strong communities and a thriving economy.

The traditional community partnership position indicates that partnering is recognized as good and an acceptable practice. However, the partnering process can be challenging for those trying to gain access to the system. With struggling schools and budget cuts, external partnerships may not always be seen as a priority. Most schools and districts abide by policy and mandated local improvement teams; however, this is not enough.

During this time of drastic national budget shortfalls and a need for improved student performance, partnerships must be reintroduced as part of the solution. Gaining trust, developing a partnership model, building a clear communication strategy, and holding a laser-like focus on education are all keys to building relevant partnerships.

## Asking the Right Questions

For businesses and other entities willing to partner, be strategic and find out about the district or school culture. Asking the right questions indicates that you are knowledgeable and interested in those things that are deemed significant. For instance:

- What do they value?
- What do they need?
- What are the priorities?
- What is the district or school improvement plan?
- What are the student performance scores or attendance rates?
- Is technology being used to reach beyond the four walls of the classroom?
- How can the partnership align with already identified goals? (This is called back loading.)
- What percentage of students goes to college or transition into the workforce? There is always a need for student internships and jobs.
- Is there a gap in their professional development and training program?

In other words, the first step is to identify the need. What specifically can you contribute that will make a difference? What will make the partnership a win-win situation?

## Building a Transition Team

The importance of partnerships as a viable source of support for student success should be underscored. In the Community Steering Committee & Transition Team Model proposed here, the educational partnership process begins at the top with the superintendent. This strategy is particularly useful for superintendents new to a district.

The first step is to form a partnership transition team. The initial transition team may be composed of selected community members who represent the larger community. Meetings with influential leaders from all walks of life are scheduled every month to focus on district goals and priorities and to discuss the needs of educational stakeholders. Be aware of past activities and efforts. Learn what resources may be available and how to access them. Discover what communication channels partners use and the relationships and connections they already have. Identifying and bringing special interest groups into the fold allows them to be involved in a nontraditional structure and it provides them with easy access to the system. A list of possible transition team members can be found in the chart below.

The goal of the transition team is to gain support, build relationships, access information, conduct a needs assessment, and devise a plan. Based on this information and data from other sources, the team will develop a comprehensive partnership plan. Once a partnership plan of action has been developed, it is ready to be rolled out and implemented throughout the greater community. At this time, the superintendent's designee or point of

### Community Steering Committee and Transition Team

*Suggested Representatives*

- Board Member(s)
- Business
- Childcare
- City Government
- Civic Group(s): Lion's Club, Rotary or Chamber of Commerce
- Educator(s)
- Emergency Services
- Ethnic Group(s)
- Faith-Based Community
- Higher Education
- Homeowner Associations
- Media
- PTA/PTO
- Realtor(s)
- Senior Citizen(s)
- State Government
- Student(s)

contact may be assigned to assist in the facilitation of the ongoing process.

### Build in a Communication Strategy

Consistent two-way communication and maintaining effective working relationships may be expanded via public forums, newsletters, blogs, surveys, websites, local education channel, twitter, LinkedIn, etc. Current examples of community empowerment partnerships include districts across the country forming education foundations and offering grants to teachers and scholarships to students. In the Gandhi School District, the education foundation, composed primarily of business people, sponsors an annual "Principal for a Day" initiative that allows community leaders to walk in the shoes of a school principal. The foundation also provided national cutting edge professional development opportunities for principals; renowned leaders were also brought in for parent and community development. Students were also supported through leadership training opportunities.

For the last nine years, the Responsible Parenting, Responsible Relationships program at Child, Inc. (Austin, TX) has celebrated parental involvement, working with the business sector to recognize parents in need of support. Through pre-determined parental involvement criteria, they are eligible to enter a drawing to win a free car; in fact, multiple cars are given away at the event. I have experienced other business partners give

away bicycles for achievements such as honor roll, perfect attendance, good citizenship, or most improved student. Still other businesses provide honored students with gift certificates, discount coupons, and even limousine rides home.

Local businesses, government, families and other members of the greater community were involved in the strategic planning process for Martin Luther King School District, an effort co-chaired by the superintendent and a local businessman. The end result was community empowerment, unity of purpose, and a shared vision. There was increased support and targeted professional development opportunities, programs and resources.

Creating schools and districts of excellence takes partnering with others and maintaining a laser-like focus on both the process and the results. Providing a high quality and relevant education for all students takes all of us, and all of us together are better than anyone of us alone. I believe public school educators are up to the challenge of preparing students for our competitive, global, and diverse society. However, schools cannot accomplish the vision alone. But, as examples from across the country show, purposeful partnerships can yield extraordinary results.

*Patricia Pickles is a partnership expert and former superintendent.*

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# Why Public Education?

## *Using Compelling and Persuasive Stories to Communicate Value*

Wille Pietersen, former CEO of Tropicana, says in his book, *Strategic Learning*, “You can’t cure a value problem with cost reductions.” To me, this statement describes the current state of public education for a couple of reasons. First, the work of teachers, administrators, and school districts is being attacked and de-valued daily. Second, the institution of public education is facing competition like never before to attract and retain students and dollars. Public education has served as the bedrock of this county. Historically, we have served nearly all of the students in a given community, meaning that the majority of state funding followed them. Sure, the check from state government has gotten smaller in recent years, but it has always come. In many states, as the system is challenged and new educational providers continue to grow, we must compete for the same students and money that has traditionally been ours. The overwhelming response to shrinking revenues is cutting costs. While this strategy works for a while and keeps districts in the black, what will happen when there are no more funds to cut? What if we were more intentional about facilitating conversations that demonstrate the value of public education through personally meaningful engagement of students, parents, alumni, business leaders, and donors?

Most school districts are currently operating under a transactional model – tax dollars are received from local, state and national public entities and, in return, we talk about the number of students served, test scores, and adequate yearly progress. While this quantitative data is important, what about the qualitative data that shows how a student’s life is changed by the work of a classroom teacher? We have failed to elevate the conversation and demonstrate the transformations that positively impact the lives of the children we serve. The questions are: What value is produced through interaction with your organization, and how do you know? In what ways would your community be damaged if you closed your doors tomorrow? Who would know or care? Are you sure?

The good news is that there are scientifically proven ways to engage your community that will increase your value, engagement and support. The most effective strategy is to collect and create stories that are compelling and persuasive. Howard Gardner, author of *Leading Minds*, says, “Leaders are successful to the extent that they tell and embody persuasive stories about where the institution they lead should be going and how to get there.” Compelling stories will engage your audience, connect them with an idea, and invite them to participate in finding a solution to a challenge.

Stories are emotionally motivating. As you write or collect your compelling and persuasive stories, consider the following points:

- **Find the Core** – Strip the idea down to its most critical essence – no more than one sentence. Help people learn and remember your core message. The more compact the idea, the more value it produces.
- **Create Surprise** – Use a surprising fact(s) that will grab the audience and make them pay attention. What is uncommon or counterintuitive about your idea, project or organization?
- **Use Concrete Language and Images** – Help people understand and remember your message. Use nouns that are concrete, visually descriptive, and free of jargon. What concrete images can you use to describe the idea or project?
- **Be Trustworthy** – We tend to agree and believe the people we know, like and trust. Link your idea to the existing values and interests of the intended audience. How can you use statistics to inform the story, rather than to prove a specific point of view?
- **Make People Care** – Create powerful associations that appeal to the audience’s self-interest and

### Examples of Compelling and Persuasive Stories

Stories don’t have to be long to make an impact on the reader. Consider these two examples, both under 100 words, but both making a strong statement on the impact of interventions in the lives of students.

#### **Julia’s Story**

Six-year-old Julia was overweight, failing in school and had poor self-esteem. Her father’s heavy drinking split the family. Julia spent many hours alone while her mother worked days and went to night school. Working with her mentor for the past two years, Julia has learned basic life skills (brushing her teeth) and found a dependable friend. Julia is becoming a responsible, confident young woman. She plays school sports, has a 3.0 grade point average, and makes friends easily. Julia simply needed routine, structure, and someone she could count on. (90 Words)

#### **David’s Story**

David was a senior and in danger of not graduating from high school. He missed many days of class due to family and health issues. Mrs. Jones, the school guidance counselor, was determined that David would not fail. She arranged extra study session and stayed after school to tutor David to ensure his success. David proudly walked across the stage on graduation day because Mrs. Jones refused to give up on him. (72 Words)

identity. We often make decisions with our heart and justify them with our minds. How can the idea be linked to something the audience already cares about?

You must create and collect different stories for different listeners. One story will not resonate the same with everyone you have to communicate with. For example, parents will be motivated by different messages than senior citizens; business leaders may be motivated by different messages than parents. One thing is for sure, we must communicate proactively and persuasively with a variety of community residents all year long, not just when we have a tax issue on the ballot.

### Steps for Creating a Compelling & Persuasive Story

- **Be Specific, but Universal** – Try to feature a challenge or person that is widely identifiable.
- **Name a Protagonist** – Use a proper name when you can. Provide as many details about this person as possible.
- **Provide Context** – Describe the circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, or challenge.
- **Identify a Challenge** – What is the situation to be overcome? In what ways did your organization help?

- **Describe the Action** – Describe what action took place. How did the protagonist interact with your organization in valuable ways?
- **Share the Results** – What happened? How was the protagonist's life changed by your organization?
- **Document** – Use photos, video and comments to demonstrate value for the protagonist. Share them widely in print and electronic communication materials.

I believe we are operating in a "new normal". This is an environment that will require public sector education organizations to compete at a higher level for students and funding. We need new tools for doing our work, and I know that storytelling is one powerful tool that will produce results and drive your long-term success.

*Christy Farnbauch, Strategic Links, LLC, is a community engagement strategist. She coaches school districts and nonprofits in ways to create connections, meaning and value. She served as the Business and Community Partnership Coordinator for Hilliard City Schools for 5 years, and currently serves as President of the Hilliard Education Foundation. Contact her at: [Christy@strategiclinks.info](mailto:Christy@strategiclinks.info).*

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## Survey Notice for Partnership Directors

**Please add your voice!**

In the next couple of weeks, DeHavilland Associates will be sending invitations to district partnership leaders to participate in a survey on current partnership efforts. We ask that you respond quickly when you receive this request.

The goal of this survey: to inform superintendents, policy makers, business leaders and others on the ways in which communities are currently supporting public education, the estimated value of that support, and the outcomes that are being realized as a result. This will help all parties make better decisions on supporting partnerships going forward.

We will be sending a copy of the survey results to all interested participants, and publishing a summary of the results in the July 2011 issue of the *K-12 Partnership Report* newsletter.

The survey will take only 10-15 minutes to complete; it will be open from May 23 through June 10, 2011.

Thanks in advance for sharing your expertise with others in the field – and please contact me directly with any questions or comments.

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