

Ideas for Elementary School Partnerships

Partnerships at the elementary school level can be very successful despite the lack of specific staff designated to seek partners.

Elementary school partnerships may be quite simple and far less formal. They are often managed by an enthusiastic teacher and an interested partner. A partnership can be between the entire school, a single class, a few students and a nearby business or community organization.

A prospective partner does not necessarily have to be a large corporation. Smaller businesses such as a local fast food restaurant, an independently owned pharmacy or a neighbourhood grocery store may be good partners for development at the local level.

Community organizations may have fewer financial resources to donate than large corporations, but may offer excellent opportunities for partnerships by sharing in-kind resources. Among the organizations that could be contacted are community service groups, social groups, athletic groups, youth groups, seniors groups.

The educational community should not be overlooked as a resource for partners. Since the goals of educational organizations are often similar, productive partnerships are often easier to plan. Partnerships that pair K-8 schools with secondary schools or secondary schools and their elementary feeder schools with post secondary institutions may also be useful. Partnerships between schools of the Peel District School Board and schools of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board may also be considered.

Every community has local or provincial agencies that can be sources for partners: elected officials and their departments; fire and police departments; community agencies; non-profit agencies; health related agencies.

Elementary school partnerships can develop in a variety of forms. They can be planned classroom programs or enrichment activities for what has already occurred in the classroom. Partnerships could be one-time activities or ongoing throughout the year. They may involve a few learners, a class or an entire school population. The possibilities are limitless when partnerships are approached with optimism, enthusiasm, creativity and commitment to the concept.

1. Local pharmacy and a grade 3 class:

Students wrote poems for special occasions such as Mother's Day and Father's Day and displayed them in the store. The pharmacy used them in a decorative motif for their special occasions promotions. For Valentine's Day, mobiles were made and suspended from the ceiling of the store.

The pharmacy participated in a community studies program by providing a tour of the facility and having the employees talk about their jobs. Books were also donated to the library and the classroom. As an extension, the manager of the store presented to the students a series on the operation of a business, the types of jobs that were provided and the skills that were necessary to carry them out.

The store sponsored special fund raising events by contributing prizes and volunteer assistance in planning and organizing the activities.

2. A Retirement Home and a school choir:

Students sing to the senior citizens at Christmas and provide several small concerts throughout the year.

3. Adopt a Grandparent:

Students were paired with senior citizens who reside in a retirement home. Throughout the year each student wrote letters or communicated in a variety of ways with their "adopted" grandparent. Visits were scheduled for each term and the student would spend some time with their "grandparent". Performances by the students included playing music, dancing, singing and reading their own poetry.

The kinds of activities shared by the two age groups depended on the age level of the learners and the strength and mobility of their senior citizens.

4. Young Enterprise:

Volunteers from an insurance company assisted a grade 5 class in forming and running a company. A board of directors was formed, shares were sold to raise finances and the company registered. A product service was developed and a product made. Learners were encouraged to plan and organize all aspects of the company. Volunteers assessed the success of the student run company and debriefed the class at the end of the enterprise. Field trips were organized to the insurance company to view the inner workings of the organization.

5. Primary Enterprise:

Learners in three primary classrooms develop a plan for their own projects. Some students required building materials such as cardboard, scrap pieces of wood, magazines and books. A number of local businesses became involved by donating cardboard boxes, pieces of wood and a variety of paper products. A local library donated discarded children's' books to be incorporated into the projects.

Some volunteers from the business community assisted the students in their individual projects or allowed the classes to visit their premises. With the permission of the learners, some of the projects were displayed in a variety of venues.

6. A Shadow Program:

This program involved grade 4, 5 and 6 learners who went as a group to a large department store to work with the employees. A learner contest was held to design a T-shirt and a school/business logo. The final design was selected, the T-shirts were sold and the funds were given to the school. Employees from the store volunteered to help a school wide Easter Egg Hunt and planted trees at the school.

Learners from the grade one class made safety posters for a store display and the gym was made available for the department store employees for volleyball games.

7. A bank and a Grade Six Class:

A mock bank was set up in the classroom with the assistance of two bank employees. The employees came to the school once a week to monitor the banking transactions and mentor the learners by providing ongoing assistance. In return, students donated a copy of the video production of their banking project.

8. Kindergarten Class and a Grocery Store:

The corner of the classroom has a mini grocery store. Cashier vests, grocery baskets, a variety of plastic fruits and vegetables and other store items are used to represent the store. Posters representing all the food groups are hung in the area.

Volunteers visit the class and describe what their jobs are and discuss where the food actually comes from. A field trip is organized and pictures of the kindergarten mini-grocery are displayed in the store.

9. Elementary School and a Car Dealership:

Learners published newsletters for the dealership including interviews with employees, writing and editing articles. Tours of the dealership were organized and discussions were held about careers. Tours of the car manufacturer were linked to the grade 8 social and environmental studies curriculum. Collaborative fund raising activities were organized to assist a community service agency and a youth club.

10. Entrepreneurial Immersion:

Two junior schools are involved in the actual development of a company in each class. Class mentorship is provided by their industry partners. The students learn all the nuances of running business from inception to product sales. The money earned is used by the school to purchase new, additional, state-of-the-art equipment, with the students receiving recognition for their contribution.

11. Publishing Company and an Elementary School:

Initially the partnership began with a tour of the facilities. Students in the junior level were invited to work side by side with an editor on their stories. Editorial staff assisted the learners in the editing and revision process of their work. Presentations were also given on how print materials are developed and how the role of each person influenced the development of the publication.

The company also hosted a number of design and slogan activities in which learners were mentored by graphic artists and editors. At the end of the sessions, a school/business logo and slogan were developed and posters were published. Computers and resource material were also donated to the school.

Learners and teachers from each level were involved in a number of projects depending on the needs of the publisher and the school. Learners and Teachers were asked to critique unpublished materials or new units. The critiquing that the learners and teachers perform is the main "return" for the company since it allows the publisher to receive first-hand consumer information on prospective books and publications.

For the future, the publisher has agreed to consider the art-work and poetry of learners to decorate some of their publications instead of relying solely on "outside" professional personnel. The normal fee would either be paid to the school or the company would supply in-kind services and/or equipment.

12. Inventor/Mentor Program:

Learners work directly with business partners in solving problems in a business setting. Some learners have worked with a technology firm to develop a network of interactive computer technology for a project.

The Future Makers Inventor/Mentor program fosters development of reasoning and problem-solving through the process of invention. Learners identify problems, generate creative ideas for solutions, develop criteria for evaluating their ideas and confront a problem by inventing a new process or product. Business partners contribute their time to serve as mentors to student teams. The program culminates with the Invention Convention, where learners present their ideas. Business mentors participate as judges, providing recognition for student work (Note: This program was first conceived in Oregon, and Etobicoke was the first school board in Canada to introduce the concept. The Learning Partnership has now adopted this program and is taking it Metro-wide.)

13. Computer-mediated Distance Education:

Distant computers are linked using two phone lines, one for data and one for audio. Instructors and learners can maintain visual and audio contact via a speaker phone or a regular telephone. Learners can ask the instructor questions using the audio component and annotate directly onto the computer screen. Learners can interact with the instructor and with other learners at different sites.

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