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Title
Schools and Communities Working Together: *Types and Principles*

Permalink

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Publication Date
1990-02-01

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Working Paper 90-03

(formerly Working Paper 015)

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THE
UNIVERSITY-OAKLAND
METROPOLITAN FORUM
SERIES

University of California at Berkeley
Institute of Urban and Regional Development

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Introduction: Types Of School-Community Partnerships

This paper presents a general classification of school-community collaborations, as well as lessons drawn from the experiences of many alliances. In this typology, a single criterion differentiates the types: the partner with whom the school or school-system is collaborating, or in other words, the segment of the community with which the school is joining forces. The segments of the community with which schools most often enter into partnerships are:

o   the business community
o   universities and colleges
o   public or private service providers
o   parents and neighborhood organizations.

Types of partnerships are therefore not mutually exclusive but complementary. Few actual partnerships fall neatly into a specific category or cover only one such category. The complexity of educational problems requires that school-districts enter into partnership with more than one organization (or with organizations of more than one type), so as to benefit from multiple sources of support. They may also try to organize these various collaborations into a coherent whole, to secure coordination by a single managing agency or office.

Moreover, each type of partnership can be implemented in different ways. For instance, a collaboration between a school district and a university can be characterized, alternatively, by strong top-down control on the part of the university, by limitation of the collaboration to specific issues on which the university has expertise, or by fully participatory action with more or less equal mutual benefits to both parties. Not just the type of partnership, but also its form, is an object of choice.

Besides the four primary parties to the partnership listed above, other players are potential collaborators for schools. First among them is *local government*. This player, however, generally does not enter into school partnerships as a primary actor. Although its collaboration may be important for the success of an alliance by influencing the level of financial and political support, a government is rarely the element around which the alliance gets organized. Many contributions by local government can be considered under the label of "service provision," while others fall in the category of "neighborhood organizations," as when a Parks and Recreation Department coordinates after-school activities with the School district in specific locations. Local governments are often present through the funds they contribute to partnerships. But this contribution, as important as it may be, does not

characterize the nature nor the form of the collaboration. Likewise, elected officials can be members of partnerships, but they most often function as brokers in the early stages of the effort and not as active participants in the long-term guidance and coordination process.

The above list of players must be completed as well by mentioning *advocacy and research groups* concerned with education and children. Many of these groups are in fact involved in partnerships, but generally on a short-term basis or as outside consultants. Their role is relatively marginal compared to the roles of businesses, colleges and universities, service agencies, parents and neighborhood groups. Still, they must be kept in mind: they can help (or hurt) school systems by publicizing important findings and by making recommendations for change. The Bay Area and California as a whole have several such organizations, such as Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth (of San Francisco) and Children Now (based in Oakland and Los Angeles).

Another set of partners for the schools can be found in *not-for-profit organizations* that use foundation grants or private and corporate donations to directly help the schools. In Oakland, the Achievement Council works in several schools to improve student performance, and the Marcus A. Foster Educational Institute stimulates excellence and innovation through various programs targeted at teachers and students. Because the types of programs that some nonprofit organizations offer are similar to those offered by institutions of higher education, because their action is often limited in scale, and because they often function as intermediaries between the business community and the schools (e.g., as Education Funds), these organizations will not be treated as a separate category. This is not to say that they are unimportant in collaborative efforts to help the schools.

As suggested above, one could also add local and national *foundations* to the list of potential partners. These do not only provide a major (if not the largest) source of funding for partnerships; they also generate their own collaborative projects and "offer" them for replication in various cities. An example of such a project is the New Futures Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. (This case will be discussed later.) Still, foundations can also be considered secondary partners in terms of direct involvement in the day-to-day process of education and the daily struggles of partnerships.

Finally, the list of possible partners could be completed by mentioning *the public at large* and *the media* which help to reach it. Although the public is very important in terms of long-term support for the schools, it cannot be considered a full and active partner in specific actions. This obviously does not mean that the media and the general public can be disregarded in any effort at improving the

schools: they can be a major source of support, as well as means to find volunteers and new partner organizations.

It is worth repeating that partnerships need not involve only one of the community partners mentioned above. Many partnerships bring together various parties in a multi-pronged effort. Despite what its name implies, the Atlanta Partnership of Business and Education, for an example, established "a collaborative working relationship between the schools, businesses, parents, students, staff, colleges, religious organizations, and other concerned school-community groups." Likewise, the Boston Compact is much more than what many people think it is. Not only the business community, but also the universities and colleges of the Boston area have signed a contract with the school district, as have local unions. Finally, formal and/or large-scale partnerships between schools and homes or between schools and neighborhood groups often fall within larger alliances, which are organized around business adoption, university support, or service agency coordination.

Partnerships with businesses

Different sub-types of partnerships fall within this general category. On the one hand, businesses can be involved in *student-focussed programs*, especially around the issue of school-to-work transition. Some partnerships, such as New Horizons in Richmond, Virginia, are based with the local Private Industry Council and attempt to give disadvantaged youth greater access to work or to post-secondary education. The programs of such partnerships include job training, paid employment (part-time, summer), remedial and life skills classes, on-the-job supervision, referral services, etc.

On the other hand, businesses can be involved in *school- or district-oriented programs*, where the unit of effort is not the individual student but a school or a school district as a whole. Examples of Adopt-a-School programs abound, in which businesses are linked to individual schools and provide them with various forms of assistance, such as mentors and tutors, grants for teachers, equipment, or maintenance help. Oakland too has such a program. Cases of system-wide collaboration are more scarce. They often have an Adopt-a-School component, but are primarily concerned with the general state of education in a city or metropolitan area (or even in a state). They use a multiplicity of means to improve education and employability and therefore will sometimes rely on various relatively independent organizations which they coordinate. An example of such a multi-tiered organization can be found in Pittsburgh:

> The nearly fifty-year-old Allegheny Conference on Community Development created the Allegheny Conference Education Fund in 1978, in order to support the Pittsburgh school system in its efforts at improving itself and at breaking its isolation in the community. The Fund, in turn, established several programs, each aimed at different issues faced by the school district. The Grants Program aims at fostering innovation in teaching; the Pittsburgh Mathematics Collaborative focuses on math education; the Principals Academy helps develop the leadership and management skills of principals; the School-Neighborhood Consortium works to establish linkages between the schools and students' homes and neighborhoods; the Educator-in-Residence Series brings national experts and leaders in the field of education to Pittsburgh; and Partnerships in Education adds the adopt-a-school dimension to the system.
>
> Partnerships in Education, however, has further diversified itself by taking responsibility for the Career Component of Pittsburgh New Futures, a project designed to help at-risk students through the collaboration of schools, service providers, and others. That is not all, though: the Career Component of New Futures includes, among other programs, the Pittsburgh Promise, a school-to-work transition program modelled after the Boston Compact. The picture is indeed quite complex. With such growth, unevenness of development may be unavoidable and some programs or individual schools come to benefit from more attention and support than others.

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In its report entitled "Allies in Education: Schools and Business Working Together for At-Risk Youth," the Philadelphia-based policy-research organization Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) presents the strengths and weaknesses of partnerships with business. On the positive side, the authors note:

o   students benefit from work experience, access to employers, and skills development, as well as form greater personal attention and greater opportunities for post-secondary education (but they benefit little or not in terms of academic achievement);

o   partnerships offer incentives to individual youth and make them experience the link between education and jobs; and

o   partnerships can serve as catalysts for global changes in the local educational system, by providing resources but also and especially by functioning as a source of advocacy and support for public education.

On the negative side, P/PV stresses two points. First, projects by such collaborations can only complement educational programs and not substitute for them; hence their direct impact on the quality of education is (very) limited. Second, the focus on employment -- a focus which characterizes most school-business partnerships -- means that these collaborations rarely manage to reach the most disadvantaged or at-risk students; hence they do not much affect the dropout rate. This last point offers further support for the multi-pronged efforts which bring together not only schools and businesses, but also service providers, parents, or universities.

Partnerships With Universities And Colleges

Many school-business partnerships involve institutions of higher education. In some cases, a college or university adopts a specific school, much like a business does. In other cases, an institution of higher education serves a support function, for example by helping teachers develop new projects for which they have received grants from a business partner. Yet in a large number of collaborations universities and colleges are primary partners of whole districts or of school clusters. Here, the focus lies not on jobs, employment skills, or financial and material resources, but on schooling itself.

School-college collaborations generally follow one or more of the following goals:

o   helping school districts improve or reform themselves as a whole, for instance in curriculum development or in programs involving parents;

o   enhancing instruction and academic achievement, in particular for at-risk youth;

o   training teachers, specialists, and administrators;

o   improving access to post-secondary education and enhancing performance after access.

Most types of programs created by school-college partnerships target students *directly*. These types of programs include:

o   college-level classes or college-preparation courses in high school;

o   tutoring and mentoring of individual students by students or advisers from the college or university;

o   academic counseling by university representatives on opportunities and requirements;

o   use of campus facilities and campus visits by high school students;

o   meetings between high schools and college students;

o   summer programs with special classes or campus activities;

o   direct financial aid from universities to high school graduates; and

o   college-organized parent involvement programs.

Other types of programs help students *indirectly*, by focussing on professional development, curriculum development, and/or research. Probably the most important contribution of colleges and universities to the improvement of instruction is made through teacher training and support. This function has been performed in various ways, ranging from formal workshops and seminars to more informal Academic Alliances (i.e., meetings of public school and college faculty from a particular discipline). Curriculum development and research have been areas of significant contributions too, for example from the University of California at Berkeley's School-University Partnership for Educational Renewal program (SUPER) to surrounding school districts.

Perhaps the largest school-university partnership is in Boston, under the umbrella of the Boston Compact. The higher education component of this district-wide effort to improve the schools and help its students is the University Agreement, a contract between the Boston Public Schools and 24 Boston Area universities and colleges:

> Born with a court-ordered desegregation plan in 1975, the University Agreement has evolved from a conflictual to a collaborative relationship. This positive evolution was due, among other things, to the support of colleges and universities in the creation of popular magnet schools, the dedication of "higher-education coordinators" sent by colleges and universities to the schools, effective guidance by the (college and university) Presidents' Steering Committee, the public visibility of the collaboration, state funding, and the willingness of colleges and universities to commit sizable resources. (In the year 1987-1988, Boston University alone contributed over $4.2 million, mostly in scholarships to graduates from Boston high schools.) System-wide coordination is assured not only by the Presidents' Steering Committee, but also by joint planning and evaluation committees.
>
> The contract between the school district and the colleges and universities established clear and measurable objectives for each party. It required an effort on several fronts on the part of the public schools: academic achievement, student retention, preparedness of graduates for college, curriculum development, monitoring of individual student progress, counseling programs, and quality of staff (both in terms of recruitment, retention, and promotion, and in terms of retraining and technical assistance). Likewise, the contract stipulated a variety of duties for the colleges and universities: technical assistance and training for schools and staff, recruitment of Boston Public Schools graduates for college, advice and support in the search for financial aid, and assistance to high school graduates once in college.
>
> In the first years of the partnership, individual colleges and universities have helped their respective public school partner(s) in the various areas mentioned above. But since 1982, when the school-college pairings were formalized as the University Agreement (that is, as part of the Boston Compact), more system-wide programs and projects have been born. Some of them, like the Job Collaborative program, are directly related to the Compact between the public schools and the business community and serve the purposes of job preparation and placement. Others are

responses to the need for student support with respect to higher education; such are the Higher Education Information Center and the Action Center for Educational Services and Scholarships. Yet other projects focus on retention in college of former Boston Public Schools graduates and on staff development. The Boston Instructional Center for teachers and the Leadership Academy for principals are examples of the latter kind of projects.

A study of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education notes that the primary beneficiaries of school-college partnerships are generally school personnel (teachers, principals, counselors, etc.) rather than students themselves. On the other hand, the latter often do benefit from the types of programs listed above, as well as from the improvement in the skills and morale of teachers and administrators. A major problem with many such partnerships, however, is their non-egalitarian nature. Indeed, quite a few collaborations suffer from a top-down relationship between universities and public schools or from a status-conscious attitude of university people during joint work. But then, other collaborations display strong mutual respect and shared learning, as is the case with the West Philadelphia Partnership. This partnerships brings together the University of Pennsylvania and the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC). What guides the collaborative effort is a view of public schools as centers of neighborhood revitalization. This effort therefore addresses both students' problems and community problems at the same time, for example, by generating student programs that involve research or even physical work on the neighborhood. It marks a departure from the narrow focus on instruction and employment -- a departure that is even stronger in the case of partnerships that focus on child welfare services.

Partnerships With Service Agencies

It is in the area of health and social services that formal school partnerships are least developed and least common. Yet it is probably in this area that they are the most needed. (One does not have to be a firm believer in "holistic" or "ecological" approaches to child welfare and education to realize that a child who is chronically hungry, who is being abused, or who has a drug problem may have academic problems.) Also, partnerships that focus on employment or further education after graduation do little to prevent students from dropping out. The creation of collaborations between schools and service agencies is therefore a very positive phenomenon.

Because this type of partnership is rather new, little research has been done on it. Yet promising cases offer great hope for the future. Some of these cases are the result of purely local initiatives, such as New Beginnings in San Diego. Other cases are part of replication or demonstration projects that involve several cities. Examples of this kind of projects are Cities in Schools and New Futures (which was already mentioned in connection with the Pittsburgh Partnerships in Education).

The common goal of school-services partnerships is to prevent dropping out of high school and to enable at-risk youth to become productive members of society. The key principles of action are, on the one hand, focus on the neglected *non-academic needs* of students and, on the other hand, *coordination* of hitherto duplicated and fragmented services. Some partnerships have broad agendas and tackle problems such as family poverty or low self-esteem. Other partnerships are more narrowly focused, for instance on the creation of school-based health centers. Yet even these can be complex: besides general health care, these clinics may also provide teen pregnancy counseling and psychological support.

Most school-service agency partnerships, such as Cities in Schools, work on the basis of case-management by school-based coordinators and intervention by interdisciplinary teams. Coordinators monitor student schoolwork and organize academic or non-academic service provision. They also help students get access to jobs, financial and legal aid, etc. Members of the interdisciplinary team are often school-based service providers (e.g., health workers, counselors), who are "on loan" from their respective agencies or institutions and remain accountable to them.

What is true for school-business partnerships and school-college partnerships is also true for school-agencies partnerships. Although the principal partner of the schools is, respectively, the business community, one or more colleges or universities, or service agencies, the collaborative involves additional partners such as religious organizations, civic groups, or neighborhood organizations who complement the primary ones. Each partner, or segment of the community, has its

specific things to offer, and the complex nature of educational problems requires the addition of these complementary elements. This is why we read, in a brochure from Cities in Schools, that each partnership "draws together leadership from the school system, local government, local human service agencies, the business community, churches, and volunteer organizations. Together these interests, talents, and resources are focussed on the dropout issue."

The core of such partnership programs, however, lies in the relationship between students and service providers (professionals or volunteers), with other participants performing support functions (e.g., community outreach or funding). Collaboration from school administrators or financial support from the private sector, are also crucial. Support from elected officials can be critical too, especially when the goal of the collaboration is to affect the whole system of services in a city or county. School-agency partnerships can indeed be catalysts for the development of an integrated network of social services in a city or county. On the other hand, city- or county-initiated efforts at coordinating services, as they are taking place in Solano and San Bernardino counties for instance, are likely to result in integrated service or referral centers in or around schools as well.

The New Future initiative provides a good example of a collaboration that aims not just at improving the interaction between individual students and service providers but also at changing the whole system of service provision:

> New Futures projects aspire to have an effect beyond the schools themselves, namely on the entire network of services to children and youth. For that purpose, a city-wide "Collaborative" must be established, bringing together top leaders from all public and private sectors of the community. These oversight boards must not only run the school-based teams; they can also engage in efforts to create a better relationship between schools and neighborhoods or a more efficient city-wide system of service delivery.
> The *New Futures Initiative* puts a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention in the areas of academic failure, dropping out, teen pregnancy, and eventual unemployment.
> The New Futures Initiative works on the basis of three premises. (1) The public institutions though which one can best affect the experiences, expectations, and values of at-risk youth are schools, social service agencies, and employment organizations. (2) At-risk youth are exposed to multiple and interrelated problems which require a collaborative approach. (3) "To successfully address the problems of at-risk youth, the responsibility for change and the accountability for results must be shared by entire communities. Hence, New Futures stresses a community-wide response rather than narrowly focused programs in isolated institutions."

Because of the complexity of such endeavors, most programs start with limited pilot projects in one or a few schools. Permanent limitation to a couple of schools is often warranted by the fact the targeted youths are geographically concentrated, so that most of them can be reached at a small set of schools. In other cases, pilot projects offer a base on which to build, after additional resources,

experience, and commitment have been acquired. (See also point 8 in "Principles for action," below.)

Partnerships With Parents And Neighborhood Organizations

The third principle of the New Futures Initiative concerns community accountability. This call for accountability has found sounding boards in the teaching profession and in the research community. Though the theme of parent involvement is not new, it has received new life, namely with an emphasis on the *direct contributions of parents to their children's education.* (The issue of participatory decision-making will not be examined here, though it must be seen as integral to the question of school-community relations.)

According to a report of the Boston-based Institute for Responsive Education on home-school partnership programs, parents are indeed important resources for education, and schools need to foster open and long-lasting contacts with them. Parents can function "as home tutors, as monitors of homework and attendance, as guides for their children in the use of community educational resources," and they can promote learning in indirect ways (e.g., reading to their children, taking children to libraries, exhibitions). Parents can also engage in school-based activities in support of teachers or other staff and they can serve as public advocates for the schools. But involvement of parents is not acquired automatically, once acquired, it must be sustained. Trust and cooperation demand frequent and effective communication, for instance through parent-teacher conferences, school-community coordinators, parent workshops, school open house sessions, telephone hotlines, or even media campaigns. Parents often require some education about the ways in which they can practically help their children. Here, parent workshops and school-community coordinators are valuable modes of intervention too.

Another side of the school-community relations at the school level is the *coordination of extra-curricular and/or after-school activities* with children-oriented neighborhood organizations. Flexibility on the part of school administrators about the use of school facilities by "outsiders" is a positive factor in school-community relations. Not only can this allow child-serving neighborhood organization to come in and provide support to teachers and other staff, it can also enables other types of local groups (e.g., senior citizen groups) to use the school an thereby make it a more integral part of community territory. The above-mentioned *West Philadelphia Improvement Corps* is trying to turn local schools into "lifecenters of the community" by making them centers of children and adult education, of health and day care services, and of recreational and social programs. WEPIC fostered yet another type of link between the school and the community by helping organize instruction and class projects around neighborhood issues.

Further contact between schools and the community can occur at the city-wide level. The channels of communication that serve an individual school can also serve a whole district. This is not only the case with publications or hotlines, but also with school-community coordinators, public meetings and conferences. Effective coordination of the various partnerships and collaborations in which the school district is engaged, at whatever geographic level, is crucial as well. Too often, an effective adopt-a-school program does not benefit those schools that need it most; too often, a local organization with valuable know-how is left out of an alliance; too often, school districts fail to apply for participation in promising replication projects for which they would be ideal cases. Most importantly, too often do several collaborations attack the same problem and work in competition rather than in collaboration with one another.

Principles For Action

Preliminary research on public/private partnerships in general has yielded a set of ten features that seem to account for success. (See Oakland Forum Working Paper No. 012, "Characteristics of Successful Civic Partnerships: Lessons for Building A Children's Agenda," April 1989.) This second round of research, on school partnerships in particular, has confirmed the importance of these factors. An old warning must be sounded: there is no proof that these features are all *causes* for success. Many other factors, related to specific local circumstances, may provide better explanations. In fact, some of the identified features may be the consequence of success rather than its cause. Still, the following ten factors represent a rather clear consensus among participants and researchers on what characterizes successful partnerships.

1. **Strong leadership:** The heart of a partnership is one or more committed leaders with a clear sense of vision and purpose--one or more persons who can motivate others and keep things going (or just hang in there long enough so that people finally go along!). A single teacher or administrator can sometime get things in motion, but more often, the driving force is an "enlightened" business leader, superintendent, or university president. They can add status and power to enthusiasm and vision.

2. **Active participation from the highest levels of the member organizations:** When it comes to committing resources and exercising pressure, only top officials or administrators can perform fast and well. When the school district is involved, leadership from the superintendent is crucial; at the school-level, commitment on the part of the principal is essential.

3. **Membership and collaboration of all key parties:** All people who will be involved in implementing and supporting the programs or projects that the partnership is trying to set up must be included in decision-making at an early stage. Success in implementation depends on their collaboration and this, in turn, depends on their sense of ownership of the project. For instance, do not leave teachers out of the planning stage if you depend on them to improve instruction. All parties must perceive that they can gain from the experience: enlightened self-interest is a more secure basis for participation than naive idealism. Parties must complement one another well in terms of resources and expertise and they must accept the principle of cooperation for a common good. For example, services cannot be integrated

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on the school-site if agencies are unwilling to leave behind turf battles, or if street-level service providers fail to accept the authority of the school-based coordinator.

4. **Broad-based support and input:** City- or county-wide alliances need public recognition and acceptance if they want to have long-lasting, systemic effects. Acceptance of the organization results, in part, from its own willingness to listen to what people have to say. Schools need children and funding; their presence depend on decisions by parents and politicians, by taxpayers and voters; reaching out to them is important. When collaborating with a college or university, a school or a district should try to involve not just one department but the whole institutions, in order to benefit from more resources and from a multi-disciplinary approach to problems. Children themselves are the best source of information about their wants and wishes; not letting them speak out can mean not only loss of information for the organizers but also loss of faith on the part of the children.

5. **Communication and networking:** True collaboration by various partners requires trust, which grows only through open and regular interaction. As said above, support from outside parties requires communication as well. Networking is essential in order to acquire new sources of support and information. School-neighborhood linkages, in particular between teachers and parents, or the coordination of various service agencies must often be established against a background of antagonism and mistrust. In these cases, talking surely helps.

6. **Effective institutionalization of the partnership:** Long-term action depends on long-term commitment of the founders (and funders) of the partnerships. But they are not eternal, they can get tired, or they may have to move out of town. Absence of funding for only a little while can be disastrous to the whole endeavor. Therefore, long-term activity (if desired; some alliance are meant to be temporary) depends on long-term funding or easily renewed funding, on the integration of partnership functions into laws, regulations, procedures, and budgets, and on the creation of committees, task forces, groups, and positions with clear structures and mandates. Support from the School District for a partnership can be made concrete and trustworthy by an explicit item in the budget, by the creation of a full-time position of "liaison" or "coordinator" within the bureaucracy, or by the existence of a "Superintendent's position" on the Steering Committee of the partnership.

Commitment from a corporation to an adopt-a-school program can be made clear by instituting new policies facilitating the use of employee work time for mentoring or school visits.

7. **Strategic planning:** Before all else, participants in collaborations should take stock and inventory of what is present and what is missing, of what is working and what is defective, of what is needed and what resources are available. Second, parties should agree on clear and unambiguous goals, on specific and measurable objectives, and on systems of evaluation and monitoring. Examples of specific and measurable objective are: reduce the dropout rate by 5% over the next three years, increase request for grants-to-teachers by 20 each year. Such clarity and concreteness are not always possible, nor always desirable, but monitoring remains a necessity, even if in more global and abstract terms.

8. **Targeted programs and projects:** The identification of projects follows from the identification of objectives and specific objectives make for specific projects. But narrow projects are required for other reasons as well. First, collaboration on concrete tasks should start as soon as possible, even if the planning process has not reached its conclusion, in order to secure commitment and in order to create a spirit of trust and cooperation from the start. Second, one learns by doing, and gaining experience from pilot or demonstration projects can save a lot of trouble later down the road.

9. **Media and promotion:** Reaching out, raising support, building a public image, acquiring credibility--all these require the dissemination of information to the public. The media can be a powerful ally, or enemy, and so can the public and elected officials.

10. **A small but high-caliber professional staff.** The staff is what makes the collaboration run smoothly. Sometimes it can provide leadership, plan for the future, and conduct research. But at the minimum, it must ensure good communication, monitor programs, and bring findings to the attention of all parties. Even when it has a very subordinate position, it must have support from the top. The role of the organization that manages a school partnership is primarily to mediate between parties and to coordinate their actions and the flows of their resources. Whether this organization is an independent nonprofit or an office within the bureaucracy, it must be the center of the

network of activities. Too much is being lost daily by misunderstanding, redundancy, and lack of cooperation in many partnerships.