K-12 Partnership Report

How Partnership Leaders Handle Retention

A survey of district-level practitioners points to effective retention strategies

In sales, the saying goes, it costs seven times as much to find a new customer as it does to keep a current one. The same concept is true in partnerships, but current partners may be even more valuable: not only does it require far less effort to maintain an existing partnership than it does to put a new one into place, it is also far less disruptive, and therefore more effective, for the students being served.

However, partnership retention has not received the attention it deserves: there is very little information available on current practices or successful strategies. To remedy this, DeHavilland Associates, publisher of the *K-12 Partnership Report*, worked with Nina Randall, Coordinator, Partners in Education, Broward County (FL) Public Schools, to survey practitioners in larger districts on their thoughts and approaches to partner retention.

Ms. Randall deserves primary credit for this survey: The idea for the survey was hers, and she provided the first draft of the questionnaire. Her work here is just one example of her leadership in the partnership field: In addition to running one of the largest partnership programs in the country, she is well-known for sharing her knowledge and experience with others.

About the Survey

This survey was conducted between July 6 and July 23, promoted twice by email to partnership practitioners across the country., and saw 109 responses in that time. The survey was targeted toward partnership leaders at the district level, with an emphasis on larger school districts, in order to tap into the experience of those with full-time staff and a larger number of school-level programs under management.

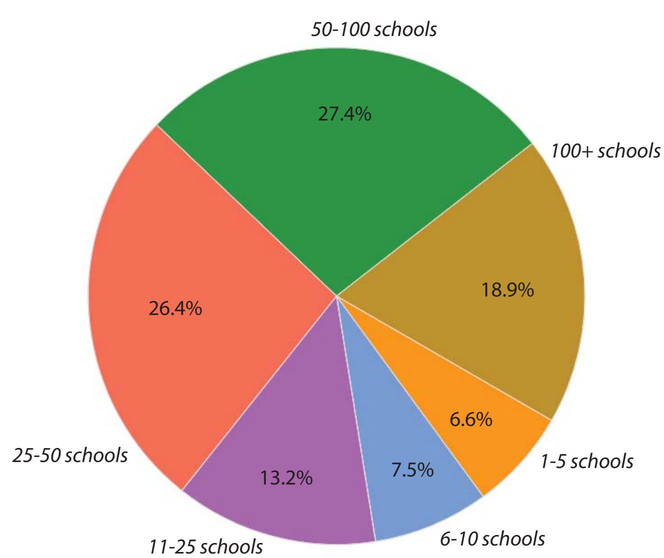
As a result of this outreach strategy, this survey should not be considered to be a representative sample of the retention experiences and practices across the K-12 education landscape: rather, it is intended to determine what works in partnership retention, relying on the those with larger programs to share their insights and experiences on the matter.

Survey Respondents

As seen in the chart below, respondents to this survey were far more likely to be found in larger districts than average. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the average US school district contains just seven schools, and less than 4% of districts contain 25 or more schools; in comparison, 72.7% of respondents to this survey were found in districts managing 25 or more schools. Again, this was by design, in order to solicit input from those with a larger number of schools engaged in partnership activity.

By approaching larger districts, we were able to reach dedicated partnership specialists: 63% of respondents report serving as district-level partnership contacts, while 12% were independent organization partnership contacts (such as leaders of standalone partnership organizations

Question: How many schools in your district?



KPR Table of Contents	August 2010 • v2n7

Also in this issue:

or chambers of commerce), 10.2% were district-level administrators not in the partnership office (often the superintendent), and just 2.8% serving as school-level partnership coordinators. Twelve percent listed a different role, with most of those serving as directors of school foundations.

Respondents were asked how many people at the district or area levels were employed full-time to support school-based partnerships. Just over one-quarter (28.6%) said none - that all were either part-time or volunteer, and that number was weighted toward respondents from smaller districts. Many (44.8%) said one or two people were employed full-time in this capacity; 16.2% said three to five people; 2.9% said six to ten people, and 7.6% said they had 11 or more full-time employees in this area, a number that included some at the largest districts as well as at some of the smaller districts, indicating that district size is not necessarily the primary factor in setting staff levels.

Structure and Services

As district-level partnership leaders, respondents to the survey were asked who served as the primary contact for partnerships at the school level, what services their district office provided to schools, and whether they track partnership outcomes.

When asked who typically served as the primary contact for partners, 24.8% of respondents stated that they retained the lead role for partnership development and management at the district level; this number was higher among those in smaller districts, where such a role would be more manageable, and lower as the size of the respondent's district grew. The most common response (36.2%) was that the school principal serves as primary contact, while 16.2% said that another administrator aside from the principal was the primary contact, 3.8% said a teacher served in that role, and 19.0% indicating that there is no single point of contact, with individual teachers or administrators overseeing individual partnerships.

Table 1 shows responses to questions about the role of the district partnership office, with most noting that

Table 1: Services Provided to Schools/ Measurement of Outcomes

	%
What partnership services do you provide to your district's schools?	
Check all that apply	
We take a primary role in finding partners for schools	68.0%
We provide resources (forms, guides, templates) to school-level contacts	66.0%
We provide direct counseling to school-level contacts on specific issues	57.3%
We track partnership data on behalf of school-level contacts	57.3%
We provide ongoing professional development to school-level contacts	52.4%
Other	26.2%
Do you track partnership outcomes?	
Check all that apply	
We track all partnership activity such as volunteer hours, etc. for all partnerships (school and district) at the district level	50.0%
We track the launch of all new partnerships (school and district) at the district level	48.1%
We do not track school-level partnership data directly, but we provide support to help schools do it themselves	26.0%
We track partnership outcomes data, such as increases in student performance, for all partnerships (school and district) at the district level	24.0%
Neither the district nor the schools generally track partnership data	21.2%

K-12 Partnership *Report*

Brett Pawlowski
Editor and Publisher

they play a key role in finding partners for schools and providing needed resources (such as guides, forms, and report templates), and many indicating additional support such as counseling and data tracking. Respondents mentioned serving in additional roles beyond those listed, including:

- Developing and managing system-wide programs providing multiple schools with mentors or other resources
- Working with district-wide partners, such as major corporations or county agencies
- Soliciting and providing funding for school-level initiatives
- Providing district-wide recognition for partners beyond what schools could offer

In terms of tracking outcomes, close to 80% of respondents state that they play some role in this area, but those roles varied: partnership leaders were more likely to track activity, such as the launch of new partnerships (48.1%) or volunteer hours (50.0%), while fewer (24.0%) tracked partnership outcomes. Smaller districts were more likely to provide support to help schools track such data themselves, and were more likely to indicate that no tracking was taking place at all at the school or district levels.

Why Do Partnerships End?

For most respondents, retention is an important issue, but not the most important that they face: Just 9.1% consider it their most pressing concern, while 60.2% note that it's important but on par with other issues such as finding new partners, tracking, and the like. A full 30.7% note that it's not a big concern to them, and feel that they're doing well in this area.

Partnership leaders were asked why partnerships most commonly end; their responses can be found in Table 2, below. The most common issues involve a lack of time on the part of school personnel and a lack of consequences for poor management; issues with tracking and recognition were frequently cited, as were issues with the partners themselves (such as cutbacks or partners going out of business).

To further explore these causes, respondents were asked whether it seems that some schools are more likely than others to lose partnerships; 77% said yes, while 23% said no. Those who had noticed differences among schools were than asked their opinions as to the causes or reasons. In addition to reinforcing some of the reasons outlined in Table 2, respondents pointed to issues such as a lack of understanding about the nature of partnerships, a lack of vision for what they want to accomplish, failure to find meaningful roles for volunteers, continuity, and of course communication.

Table 2: Why Partnerships End

Survey Item	Not at all/not very frequent	Sometimes	Frequent/ very frequent
Below are some common reasons why partnerships end. Please indicate how frequently these issues come up in your partnerships.			
School personnel have no time to manage partnerships properly	21.2%	40.0%	38.9%
There are no consequences for managing partnerships poorly	30.2%	36.0%	33.7%
Partnership did not track activity or outcomes; partner did not see results for their efforts	43.8%	32.6%	23.6%
Business is no longer operational or experiencing cutbacks	19.3%	58.0%	22.7%
School did not employ good partnership recognition strategies	39.8%	37.5%	22.7%
Transfer or promotion of CEO or designated business-site partnership coordinator	39.1%	39.1%	21.8%
Transfer or promotion of principal or designated school-based partnership coordinator	35.2%	44.3%	20.5%
School did not employ good retention strategies	37.1%	42.7%	20.2%
There is not enough district support	53.3%	27.8%	18.9%
Partnership did not meet partner needs	37.9%	51.7%	10.3%
Partner did not feel like an equal in the partnership; they were 'outmanned'	64.8%	27.3%	7.9%
Principal is not supportive of community involvement	62.2%	32.2%	5.5%
Business is no longer interested	55.7%	39.8%	4.5%

A few comments captured these themes particularly well:

- *Business partner coordinator's responsibilities are usually another hat to wear by an already busy employee. New coordinators find it difficult to manage their time in a new position with many 'hats.'*
- *They do not see partnership aspect; they expect businesses to give to them.*
- *A lack of administrator involvement and the partner not realizing a true need for their work.*
- *It is almost always that those schools that frequently lose partners have a principal that does not value community involvement.*
- *It's about the people: the instructional leader (principal) has to encourage and support partnerships or teachers aren't going to take the time to invest in them.*
- *Lack of commitment or vision from the school site. Failure to value the contributions that can be made by a partner.*
- *Lack of communication throughout the year due to poorly defined goals established at the beginning of the school year with responsibilities attached. Use of partners for only monetary support.*
- *Not a priority with the principal; principal creates barriers to business involvement.*
- *Partnerships are best with a strong and supportive principal at the school level and a responsive individual contact who handles day-to-day partner relations.*
- *Partnerships are sometimes viewed and treated as the 'financier' of school wants and needs.*
- *Personnel changes and curriculum demands are the biggest drivers. If the teacher leaves, or the business contact leaves, often they were the only ones involved in the partnership.*
- *Appropriate resources and attention must be given to growing and maintaining the partnership.*
- *As a district we don't do a good enough job at celebrating all the great things that are happening in our schools because most of the time we're not aware.*
- *The time, effort, care, and stewardship of the partnership must be a high priority for the school principal. Phone calls must be returned, emails must be answered and school leadership must be strong. Additionally, the principal must say no to things that the partner may want to do but aren't a good fit for the school.*

Table 3: School-Level Retention Strategies

Survey Item	Ineffective/ somewhat ineffective	Somewhat effective	Effective/ very effective	Not applicable
Below are some strategies that school staff use for partnership retention. Please indicate how effective each strategy has been for your schools.				
School is a positive environment in which to work/volunteer	2.3%	9.1%	88.6%	0%
School recognizes their partners frequently and in a variety of ways	1.1%	11.4%	85.2%	2.3%
School deals with problems promptly	2.3%	11.5%	83.9%	2.3%
Staff makes it a priority to address partner needs/concerns	4.6%	10.3%	83.9%	1.1%
Schools and their partners communicate frequently	1.1%	14.8%	80.7%	3.4%
The principal stays engaged with partnerships	5.7%	12.6%	79.3%	2.3%
Needs of partners have been identified and are addressed	4.7%	15.1%	76.7%	3.5%
Partners know how they impact student achievement	6.8%	13.6%	71.6%	8.0%
Partner volunteers receive training	3.6%	14.1%	62.4%	20.0%
School provides their partners with outcome data on the effectiveness of activities in supporting student achievement	14.8%	17.0%	58.0%	10.2%
Partners receive orientation	5.7%	9.2%	57.5%	27.6%
School-based partnership coordinators hold an administrative position at school	4.6%	16.3%	40.7%	38.4%
Effective partnerships are part of the designated school-based partnership coordinator's annual review	4.6%	6.9%	39.0%	49.4%
A stipend is paid to the school-based partnership coordinator	11.4%	6.9%	18.3%	63.2%

Strategies for Addressing Retention

Respondents were asked to share their retention strategies at both the school and district levels; responses are found in Tables 3 and 4.

In terms of school-based retention strategies, many are well-known and commonly implemented, such as making the school a welcoming environment, recognizing partners, communicating with partners, and ensuring that the principal (often the primary contact) stays engaged in partnership initiatives. Responses are more varied in other areas: just 62.4% believe it is effective or very effective for partner volunteers to receive training, with 20% labeling that approach as "not applicable," meaning it's not happening within their schools. Many partners also do not receive an orientation, with 27.6% listing that strategy as not applicable. Other choices show that partnerships are not built in to the leadership structure: 38.4% say that school-based partnership coordinators do not hold administrative positions, and 49.4% indicate that partnerships are not represented as part of the school-based partnership coordinator's annual review. Since stipends are commonly paid to volunteers or outside help, it is not surprising that most (63.2%) list stipends as not applicable here.

District leaders were asked to share additional school-level strategies in an open-ended followup to this question. Many of the responses involved strategies for more fully incorporating partners into school operations and ensuring that partners received a reward for their commitment. Comments included the following:

- *Celebrate successes; invite partners to other important events.*
- *Consider them part of their school 'family,' inviting them to school events, adding them to email newsletter mailing lists, etc.*
- *Creating a general environment where partners feel welcomed and useful is the most effective way. Being really organized helps too. Last, student preparation is huge: schools that are ineffective tend to not prepare students for successful interactions.*
- *Document the purpose, goals, and activities of the partnership.*
- *Engage partners in leadership positions, such as on School Advisory Councils.*
- *Give back to partners…have students provide artwork or music groups for business partners.*
- *It is important for partnership coordinators to bring all partners around the table in a partnership advisory team and/or via SPMT (School Program Management Team).*
- *Opportunities for partners to 'debrief' with district leadership along with recognition at the district level.*
- *Partners are kept in the loop about other partnerships*

Table 4: District-Level Retention Strategies

Survey Item	Ineffective/ somewhat ineffective	Somewhat effective	Effective/ very effective	Not applicable
Below are some strategies that district partnership staff use to impact school-based partnership retention. Please indicate how effective each strategy has been in your district.				
District staff is involved in partnerships at the school level	3.4%	17.2%	64.3%	14.9%
District staff intervenes at the school level when problems arise	3.4%	20.7%	54.0%	21.8%
Partnerships are part of the school board strategic plan	4.6%	15.9%	53.4%	26.1%
District provides annual partnership awards recognition	0%	13.8%	51.7%	34.5%
District requires each school to designate a coordinator	0%	20.9%	44.2%	34.9%
District provides regular training for school-based partnership coordinators	2.3%	19.5%	42.5%	35.6%
District staff monitors partnership agreements	8.0%	18.4%	31.0%	42.5%
District partnership staff has the authority to enforce district partnership policies and retention best practices	9.1%	11.5%	31.0%	48.3%
District requires partnership agreements to be signed annually	3.4%	19.5%	27.6%	49.4%
District publishes outputs and outcomes for each partnership	4.6%	13.8%	21.8%	59.8%
Effective partnerships are part of a principal's annual review	9.4%	11.6%	20.9%	58.1%

so they know that others are involved too.*

- *Partners understand exactly what their donations (time, money, etc.) are being used for.*
- *Staff are aware of what the partners do and utilize them to the best of their abilities.*
- *We ask partners to complete a partnership agreement with the school representatives to clarify exactly how the partnership will roll out and to identify outcomes.*
- *We brand the partnership and offer as many opportunities for the businesses to be in front of our parents and others as possible: during student orientation, at PTA meetings, on school letterhead, on banners and posters...*
- *We get together as a group yearly. It is a good opportunity for partners to network and establish goals with principals for the upcoming school year.*

Respondents were also asked to share thoughts on how district offices could support school-level partnership retention efforts; Table 4 shows their responses.

The strategies listed are generally thought to be more effective than not, with general involvement and intervention at the top of the list. What is surprising is that so many were identified as not applicable, indicating that they were not in place in respondents' districts:

- Approximately one-third do not hold annual recognition events (34.5%), do not require schools to designate a coordinator (34.9%), or do not provide regular training for school-based partnership coordinators (35.6%).
- Nearly half of respondents indicate that their districts do not monitor partnership agreements (42.5%), enforce district policies and practices (48.3%), or require partnership agreements to be signed annually (49.4%).
- Close to 60% of respondents note that their districts do not include partnerships as part of a principal's annual review (58.1%) or publish the outputs and outcomes of each partnership (59.8%).

Conclusion

Given the small sizes of district-level partnership offices in some of the largest school districts in the country, it is not surprising that most of the work being done on retention is taking place at the school level, with general support (providing resources and guidance) coming from district offices. However, for those able to implement specific strategies, respondents report a real impact for their efforts. As a result, district partnership leaders would do well to share the school-level strategies listed here with their school contacts, and where possible, implement effective district-level support models while lobbying internally for structural reforms, such as having partnership work included in staff performance reviews.

Strategies for Connecting With Stakeholders

Seven ways to engage more partners, raise more money, and connect with more fans

Imagine that you've spent weeks designing a new partnership program or writing a sponsorship appeal, and you're sure it's exactly what your organization needs. Then, you begin to "sell" your new idea or program and no one – partners, sponsors or co-workers – is particularly interested. Sound familiar?

There is good news for this challenge. Social scientists and brain researchers study ways to guide and change the attitudes and behaviors of humans. This article is designed to provide you with simple, practical ways to use research-based strategies for engaging more partners, raising more money and connecting with more fans.

#1 – It's About Them, Not You

Too often, we design ideas, partnerships and products in a vacuum. We create something new based on personal experiences and what we think our constituents need. When was the last time you asked your constituents what would be meaningful for them? How can you help them do their work better or create added value for their company or organization? I guarantee that if you ask them, they'll tell you. Find out what's important to them personally and professionally, instead of telling them what's important to you. As Steven Covey would say, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Once you learn what is important to them, make connections in authentic ways, and be honest about what you can help with and what you can't. If your organization is not able to take on something that is important to the constituent, try to help find another partner who can.

#2 – Get Clear

Find the core of your idea. When I say core, I mean one short sentence - five to seven words - or up to three basic points. Strip the idea down to its most critical essence. Weed out all the superfluous and tangential elements. A good tool for helping you do this is to keep asking "Why?" After answering "why" about four times, you will get to the essence of the idea or program. Then, share the core of that idea.

Core messages help people avoid bad choices and distractions by reminding them what's important. In addition, they're easier to retain and share, as we are better able to learn and remember simple, core messages. You must pack a lot of meaning into a little bit of messaging. If a message can't be used to make predictions or decisions, it lacks value, no matter how accurate or comprehensive it is.

Here's an example: For the first time in 43 years, and after two years of research, the YMCA has unveiled a new brand strategy (core idea) to increase understanding of the impact the nonprofit makes in communities. The Y is focused on helping communities 1) nurture the potential of youth and teens; 2) improve the nation's health; and 3) provide opportunities to support neighbors. Who can argue with those three points? And, what is predicted by these three, clear points is that: 1) youth and teens will be safe and cared for; 2) people across the nation will be healthier; and 3) neighbors will help and support one another. Now that's an organization I want to support!

#3 – Bring 'Em To Tears

Humans are emotional creatures. Sure, we can be logical, smart people, but when it comes to making decisions, our emotions often win out. The attitudes that drive our motivations and behaviors are formed by: 1) having a direct experience with an event or organization; 2) having a similar experience offered by a similar event or organization; or 3) hearing or learning about an experience from trusted friends and colleagues. In other words, how do we "feel" about our past experiences?

What kinds of experiences have your intended audiences had with your organization? Refer to point

#1, collect data. Ask them to tell you about a personally meaningful experience they have had in your district, or with your organization. I've used this question thousands of times, and I guarantee they will tell you. We all like to tell our stories. The benefits will be rich copy for your next program brochure or website, and repeat partnerships or donations. If they've had meaningful experiences with you in the past, they'll most likely trust and care about your latest idea or program. Your task is to continually remind them of the meaningful experiences they've had with you.

#4 – Wash, Rinse, Repeat

It's no secret that we live in a fast-paced, rapidly changing world. And, we're on information overload, bombarded by 2,500-3,000 messages per day. Communication experts say we have to be exposed to a message 12 times before it sticks and we decide to take action. Thousands of companies, organizations and people are vying to capture our support for their latest product, program or cause. It's difficult to cut through this clutter. All the more reason to have a clear, concise message that appeals to your audience's emotions, then to repeat your message many times a day in many places and forms – print, verbal, digital. Here are a few places to communicate your message, 24/7: 1) print the message on the back of business cards; 2) post it on your website, preferably with testimonials of happy people you've worked with; 3) post on Facebook, Twitter or other social networking sites; 4) create a video for YouTube; 5) include in all print pieces such as brochures, bookmarks, etc.; and 6) begin your 90 second "elevator" speech with your key message.

#5 – Make It Personal

If possible, connect your program, cause or fundraising appeal to one person. Research by Dan Ariely proves that we care more about a cause when it is linked to an "identifiable" life. For example, say you work for a large public school district that serves 15,000 students. Find a way to tell the success story of one student or a small group of students, not all 15,000. When we are asked to help with large problems, we often feel like the problem is too large and we don't respond at all.

Remember to thank and recognize partners and contributors in personal ways. Annual recognition celebrations are good, but how about sending a hand-written thank you note? Better yet, include a photo of a student who benefited from the program or donation. Ask the student what was personally meaningful about the program and include their quote in the card. You get the idea – a personal touch goes a long way.

#6 – Create Peer Pressure

In times of uncertainty, we often rely on the actions of others to tell us how to act or respond. Humans routinely follow others we think are making good decisions. Take an inventory of how many business partners you have. Are their names displayed publicly, so I can find other people like me who are involved with your organization, program or cause? Ask your current supporters to allow you to post a photo or video testimonial on your website about their work with you. Again, be brief, but powerful. You can say a lot in 30 seconds.

For an example of how peer pressure works, study Apple. They are masterful at creating "social communities" of like-minded people to purchase their products. Or, how did the Obama campaign convince hundreds of people to stand in line for hours to vote early following a political rally? Peer pressure. People were happy to wait for hours with people whom they perceived shared their values and supported the same causes.

#7 – Tell A Story

A well-told story tells people how to act, and provides the motivation for doing so. Relying on past experiences is much more effective than predicting future outcomes. Brain research tells us that the systems in the brain that control experience and perception also control imagination. This is partly why change and new ways of thinking are so hard to accomplish. Past experiences and perceptions tend to overpower the desire to try something new. Stories put knowledge and information into a framework that is more lifelike and true to our day-to-day existence, helping to drive action through inspiration and example. Stories engage the audience, involving them with the idea and asking them to participate with you.

Finally, if you want to change behavior and motivate action, your work must be understandable and memorable. It will take forethought, focus, and planning, but the payoff for you, your organization and your community will be huge.

Christy Farnbauch founded Strategic Links, LLC in 2006 to help school districts and nonprofits to help them use practical ideas from a variety of sectors to support innovation and relevance. She spent five years as the Business and Community Partnership Coordinator for Hilliard City Schools, Ohio's 8th largest school district. You can find more practical tips on her website at: www.strategiclinks.info.

The Micah Initiative

Faith communities, whether churches, synagogues, or mosques, have long played a role in meeting the needs of children; however, until recently, much of that work took place outside of the school environment. Over the past 20 years, the relationship between schools and communities of faith has changed, as both realized that they could fulfill their respective missions of education and service without compromising the separation of church and state. The Micah Initiative, a community-wide coalition of faith communities initiative in Richmond VA, is an excellent example of the contribution that faith communities can make within the K-12 environment.

Origin of The Micah Initiative

Over the course of time in the late 1990s and early 2000s, various houses of faith in the Richmond market began various types of school outreach programs. The goals and structures of these programs varied by the resources and interests of each faith community: some focused on volunteering, some on mentoring, some on providing needed services (food programs, etc.), and some in specific areas of the curriculum, such as literacy.

As communities of faith began to notice the work being done by others, they started to realize the benefits of instituting a larger community-wide effort. The idea was not to redirect the work that individual churches were doing, but rather to promote school partnerships within the faith community, including recruiting other churches to participate; providing a point of coordination among the various houses, for purposes of training and networking; and giving the school district a single point of contact on issues such as data tracking.

In 2003, The Micah Association was launched as an informal coalition, brought about by the Jewish Coalition for Literacy, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and several other faith communities and, while it has never been incorporated as a formal standalone organization, it continues to serve as an important institution advocating for school engagement by faith communities.

Operations

The Micah Initiative was launched by just a handful of faith institutions, but as it grew, the partners realized they needed a full-time coordinator to promote school service with other churches and establish and support individual partnerships. As its contribution to this initiative, Richmond Hill, one of the partner churches, agreed to underwrite the cost of Mieko Timmons to serve as coordinator, a role she continues to fill.

Each participating church selects one representative to serve as their point of contact for the Initiative; this person is sometimes a religious leader but more often is a member of the particular faith community. This coordinator is responsible for all aspects of their church's relationship with the education community: they are the lead contact with their partner school, they work within their church to recruit volunteers and report on their successes, and they act as liaison to The Micah Initiative to stay informed of other programs and to report on their activities. As coordinator of the program, Timmons keeps in regular contact with member institutions, holding quarterly meetings and an annual event.

Before the Micah Initiative was launched, each house of worship decided on their own approach to supporting schools, and that philosophy continues: they decide what they want to do (in conjunction with their partner

The Micah Initiative

Where:
Richmond, VA

Partner(s):
A coalition of faith communities; Richmond County Schools; the Virginia Mentoring Partnership

Challenge:
Various churches, synagogues, and mosques were becoming involved in education, but there was no communication between the entities, no effort to involve other communities of faith, and no support for their efforts.

Solution:
The Micah Initiative, launched in 2003 with a handful of churches, was created to connect these individual churches to allow networking and sharing of strategies and practices; to recruit additional houses of faith; and to provide support to school/church partnerships in the areas of connecting and establishing partnership programs

Partner Roles:
Each church continues to work with its partner school to define its role; however, thanks to the work of The Micah Initiative, there is support in connecting with the appropriate school, and there are quarterly opportunities for church representatives to share their experiences and approaches so each may learn from the others. The coalition's coordinator is also active in recruiting additional faith communities.

Outcomes:
The Micah Initiative now counts 107 churches among its members, each of which is involved in supporting schools and students in some way. Other communities are now looking at launching similar coalitions in their cities.

schools) based on their interests and on the resources that they are able to commit to the relationship. What has changed as a result of this coalition is that churches are more easily matched with a compatible school, and a representative of The Micah Initiative (usually Timmons) is on hand during the initial introductions and to act as a liaison if any challenges arise.

In addition to this support for the school/church relationship, participating in The Micah Initiative gives church representatives access to information on what others are doing, which has proven to be an invaluable source of ideas and strategies for those interested in building effective support models. This happens at quarterly meeting as well as through informal networking through various channels.

As an umbrella organization, the Initiative has also helped put in place additional supports, such as a training relationship with the Virginia Mentoring Partnership, which is made available to volunteers interested in being better prepared for their experience in the schools. They are also able to work with the Richmond Public Schools district office to track activity and report on the work being done by all member institutions.

Of course, one of the most important functions of the Micah Initiative is to expand its coalition of faith communities. Timmons spends a great deal of time reaching out to new churches and responding to inquiries, particularly as the Initiative becomes better-known in the Richmond market.

Outcomes

Since its founding, the coalition has grown markedly: After starting with a handful of participating churches, The Micah Initiative now counts 107 faith communities among its members, and with the exception of one church closing, has not lost any of its members to date.

While it has seen a dramatic increase in member activity since its founding, it is challenging for the Initiative to report aggregate outcomes, as each church/school pairing sets its own goals and objectives. Timmons does receive summary data on partner activity each year and shares that with church representatives, but beyond those reports, the successes of their members come in the form of anecdotal stories. But the number of stories shared, and the impact of each partnership, shows that their work is making a difference in the lives of students.

While The Micah Initiative does not plan to expand beyond its market, the concept of an interfaith network is beginning to take hold elsewhere: representatives from two different cities in Tennessee have already asked for guidance in creating similar coalitions. So in addition to a significant impact in Richmond, The Micah Initiative could prove to be a national model, which would be a tremendous contribution to churches and schools everywhere.

Resource Links

The Micah Initiative
www.richmondhillva.org/what/micah.html

Virginia Mentoring Partnership
www.vamentoring.org

Expectations and Responsibilities for Stakeholders

Expectations and Responsibilities for a Participating Faith Community

- Secure endorsements of the faith community's leadership and governing body.
- Recognize that the faith community's mission in the school is to support the school's Principal and staff.
- Recognize that a faith community/school partnership is a growing relationship built on trust and commitment. Allow at least a year for a relationship of trust to develop and real work to take place.
- Establish open, ongoing communication and mutual planning.
- Provide human resources of volunteer time and energy rather than material resources.
- Supply a small group of volunteers to allow the involved faith and school communities to evolve an effective program.
- Designate a committed volunteer coordinator, preferably with part-time compensation, who will recruit faith community members and communicate with the school principal and staff.
- Provide volunteer training through Virginia Mentoring Partnership, as well as training specific to school location.
- Accept the premise that as much learning will occur for adult volunteers as for student mentees.
- Offer on-going in-service training and forums for spiritual support.
- Require volunteers who mentor/tutor in schools to make a definite, limited commitment, for example, 45 minutes per week.
- Encourage individual volunteers to be flexible and responsible.
- Expect challenges and difficulties, as well as joys and surprises.
- Implement a process for on-going review and evaluation, crisis and complaint procedure.

Expectations and Responsibilities for a School Principal

- Designate a school staff who will coordinate volunteer/tutor placement.
- Ensure that tutors have information about students in order for them to provide optimum academic support.
- Communicate regularly with faith community point person who also attends the school's strategic planning and management team meetings monthly.
- Agree on goals and desired outcomes of volunteers' help.
- Implement a process for on-going review and evaluation, crisis and complaint procedure.
- Affirm and maintain open, ongoing communication and mutual planning.

Conducting a Strategic Review

How to take the next step with your successful partnership initiative

Building a successful partnership program is hard work: it takes vision, effort, and a sustained commitment to get it up and running. And once it's in motion, producing the results you had hoped for, it's easy to go on autopilot, slipping back to maintenance mode on your now-proven program while you look for other fires to put out.

But if you've got a successful campaign, autopilot may be the riskiest path you can take. Partnership programs involve lots of moving parts, and over time, circumstances can change, resulting in your initiative slowly—or suddenly—becoming less effective or even unnecessary. For that reason, it makes sense to conduct regular strategic reviews of your programs. Not only will this allow you to ensure the program's continued effectiveness, it might even help you expand the program for an even greater impact.

Note that the strategic review is different from regular measurement and evaluation efforts. Data tracking systems are like the indicators on the dashboard of your car: they'll tell you how fast you're going and whether you're running low on gas or oil. But they won't tell you what's happening outside the car: they won't tell you whether it's snowing, or whether a bridge is out on the road ahead.

In order to make sure your program responds to the current state of the market – i.e., those external conditions outside the scope of your evaluation "dashboard" – you need to institute a period strategic review of your efforts.

Planning the Strategic Review

A strategic review is an opportunity to step back from day-to-day operations and review the work you've done to date, the landscape in which you operate, and whether you need a course correction in order to continue providing value to your constituents. For many people, this is an annual exercise, although some people conduct reviews on a more frequent basis (often in markets experiencing more rapid change). When possible, it should be conducted off-site, reducing distractions and supporting your efforts to get a fresh perspective.

It's best to start planning for your strategic review several weeks prior to any sort of actual retreat: many of the questions you'll need to answer will require some research and synthesis well before you begin brainstorming and strategizing on next steps. It's also wise to include others in this exercise, particularly those who can offer different perspectives, in order to avoid operating in an "echo chamber." If you have a board of directors, include them, and look also to any key figures involved in the program, like your lead volunteer, school or district leader, key funders, and other stakeholders who are familiar with your program and can offer good perspective. Be sure they have any supporting documents well in advance so they have time to prepare for your strategy session.

Elements of the Strategic Review

Some of the big-picture items you should incorporate into your strategic review include:

<u>Causal Model</u>

A causal model, or theory of change, simply outlines how your program is intended to work. When you launched your initiative, it was based on a causal model: you had a target population that you wanted to move from point A to point B along some axis, and your intervention caused that change. It's time to take a fresh look at all of those elements.

- You designed your program to serve a specific population - is your target population still the correct one? The children (or other population) that you serve – are they still the right audience for your program?
- If your intervention is designed to move them from one point to another, are they still at point A? Your program is designed to move program participants ahead in some way – have they moved ahead on their own through some other intervention (such as a change in the school curriculum), eliminating the need for intervention?
- Do they still need to get to point B? Have you seen any evidence that your desired outcome is no longer valid? Has there been any new research indicating that children don't benefit from being proficient in the area you've selected?
- Is the axis of change still the correct one? The thing that you're working to improve, whether graduation rates, test scores, or something else – is it still relevant and important? Is there now a better way to define it, or a way to narrow your focus within that area to better target your efforts and create a greater impact?
- Is your intervention still the right agent of change to reach your goals effectively and efficiently? Has anything come to light, such as new research or new technology, that would allow you to better help program participants succeed? Are there new ways of operating that you should consider going forward?

Competition

No program operates in a vacuum: there are often alternate opportunities available to your chosen audiences. When considering the services you offer to your target audience, are there any new organizations operating in your market, or have existing organizations expanded their service area or capabilities to become new (or better) competitors?

If new competition exists, how well are they meeting the need of the market? If they're doing a good job, does it make sense to rethink your objectives and focus on an area that's not currently served? Are there opportunities for collaboration in order to avoid duplication of effort? Or can you work in a complementary capacity to better fill the needs of your constituents? How else can you differentiate yourself to provide clear and distinct benefits to your audience and to your stakeholders?

Asset mix

As sponsors and supporters come and go, the mix of assets available to fuel your efforts will inevitably change. What does this mean to your way of doing business? Have you lost certain types of resources that are expensive to replace, such as having to purchase materials that were once donated? Have you gained a new type of asset thanks to the addition of a new partner? This is the time to consider how your program aligns with your asset mix, and if there is a disconnect, to figure out ways to take full advantage of the resources currently available to you.

Feedback

Assuming you've been collecting feedback from program participants and supporters, what are they telling you about your program? This type of feedback, from people who have a vested interest in your work, is valuable and should be given due consideration.

Manpower

The strategic review is the perfect time to consider manpower issues, both in terms of full-time and volunteer positions. Depending on what you want to achieve during the next operational cycle, you may need to increase staff across the board, grow in certain areas, make cuts, or shift people to areas that need attention. Be wary about adding full-time employees: your overhead will grow considerably. Consider first whether your needs are temporary or permanent, and whether you can meet your needs with part time, contract, or volunteer support.

Operations

It should be standard procedure to review business operations on a regular (often annual) basis, and it is particularly helpful to have data on your performance in previous years to use in benchmarking your current efforts. Two areas in particular to consider: make sure that your administrative budget isn't growing out of proportion to other areas of your operation, and look to see whether you're maintaining or increasing the return you see on your investment in development activities.

Growth

If you're achieving the kinds of results you intended, and if you've managed to build a sustainable enterprise, it may be time to consider a path to growth. This could take several forms, including:

- Expansion to different geographical markets
- Broadening your target audience – either serving more children or accepting other groups of children (different ages, different needs), making sure to accommodate them based on their differing characteristics as necessary
- Building on your list of targeted goals - adding new objectives, such as content, skill, behavioral, or attitudinal objectives to the list of things you wish to accomplish
- Increasing the channels through which you operate - you may consider expanding to web-based content delivery, a video series, published resources, or other ways of building new outlets to your desired market.

By stepping back to review all of the elements of your proven programs, both internal and external, you'll not only ensure that your campaign remains relevant and vibrant, you'll be uncovering opportunities to build on existing success - a far easier prospect than creating new programs from scratch.