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A SURVEY OF SCHOOL/BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

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Introduction

Good science teachers enrich their classes in a variety of ways with creative use of media and hands-on laboratory exercises. They also use community resources successfully to stimulate student interest (traditionally in the form of field trips and guest speakers). An extension of this idea is for educators to create an alliance or partnership with a business or other organization. The goals of the survey reported here were to discover the thoughts of people with an interest in partnerships or alliances and for the Iowa Alliance for Science to use this information to help facilitate partnerships.

Background Information

In 1983, when *A Nation at Risk* was issued, the economic health of the United States was a growing concern. The authors of *A Nation at Risk* were concerned that the observed decline in economic productivity was related to a decline in educational excellence. Phyllis Marcuccio (1983) noted that the crisis was an "economic Sputnik." Since then, over 300 reports and articles have called for an improvement in education, including President Bush's 1990 State of the Union Address. A frequently proposed solution is the formation of school/business partnerships. The rationale being that, if education is related positively to economic health, then businesses have a vested interest in the quality of education.

In addition to reports about the health of American education, numerous reports about school/business partnerships or alliances have been published. Some of these reports include discussions regarding the nature of partnerships (Clark, 1988; Galagan, 1988; Glass, 1983; Huddleston & Fenwick, 1983; Wise, 1981; Woodside, 1984; Wynne, 1986). Others present case studies of specific partnerships (Cameron, 1987; Coble, Gardiner & Habit, 1988; Dickinson, 1987; McCormick, 1984; Roth, 1987). Some of these authors, cautious about adopting partnerships, alerted educators to potential problems (Bakalis, 1987; Clark, 1986; Mann, 1984; Woodside, 1984). The Triangle Coalition for Science and Technology Education (1986) released a handbook on starting and maintaining partnerships.

Shive and Rogus (1979) defined a school/business partnership as "an agreement between school and business representatives to a mutually acceptable set of purposes and means for achieving such

purposes" (286). Partnerships can take many forms. They range in scope from local teacher/business partnerships to an entire district allied with a corporation or corporations. The benefits to the school are obvious, but what are the benefits for a business?

Noting several reasons for businesses to participate in education partnerships, Glass (1983) put them into three categories: (1) civic duty--"an opportunity to return some of the public's investment" (92), (2) career education, and (3) communication--"the needs, interest and nature of business and industry can best be communicated through direct involvement in the educational process" (93). Burke (1986) echoed similar ideas about the interest of business in education.

Methods

Iowa Governor Terry E. Branstad used his January 1986 State of the State Address to establish the Iowa Alliance for Science. The Alliance was charged with the responsibility of promoting school/business partnerships. Ongoing Alliance efforts include publications, a television film, a *Resource Catalog*, an awards program recognizing successful partnerships and the annual Governor's Conference on Science, Mathematics and Technology Education.

Participants at the 1987 and 1989 Governor's Conferences (including teachers, administrators and business persons) were surveyed and further surveys were mailed in the first week of November 1989. A follow-up letter and survey were sent to non-respondents six weeks later.

The survey was created by a subcommittee of the Iowa Alliance for Science. To enhance reliability, the original questions were reviewed by the entire Alliance steering committee, which is comprised of people closely associated with school/business partnerships. The first section of the questionnaire sought to determine the demographics of the respondents. It identified whether or not the respondents were involved in partnership activities and, if they were, the nature of their partnerships. The second section focused on the barriers faced by the respondents in establishing or expanding a partnership.

Data

One hundred sixty surveys were sent out and 111 returned. Of these, 96 were usable to the Alliance researchers (the remaining fifteen were returned as "undeliverable"). For this report, the questions of interest pertained to the existence of a partnership and the barriers the respondents perceived as existing in the creation or continuation of partnerships.

Because of the open-ended nature of the questions, each of the surveys was individually read and judgements made as to the areas of concern expressed in the responses. To classify the responses, 15 response categories were generated using the author's own judgement

based on the literature. Each of the categories that were applicable to the response received one tally. Some respondents expressed concerns that fit into several categories while others focused on a single barrier. After the surveys were read and judgements made about the concerns expressed, the tallies for each response category were summed. The data were then organized by the number of respondents expressing a concern for each of the response categories.

Table 1 presents a summary of the responses. The categories are presented in rank order of the total responses. It should be remembered that these numbers are responses that indicated barriers to the formation and/or maintenance of a partnership. The "no" and "yes" columns indicate the absence or presence of a partnership involving the respondents. Those respondents who failed to indicate if they were involved in partnership activities were recorded in the "not indicated" column.

Results and Discussion

The overall results demonstrate that "time for partnership activities" is the primary barrier to the formation and/or maintenance of school/business partnerships. "Leadership from superiors or colleagues" is the second largest barrier (leadership was an issue noted by Burke [1986] and Mann [1984]). Almost as frequently mentioned was the desire for "information about other partnerships." Less than 10 percent of the responses fell into the five categories ranked at the bottom of the table, which would imply that these were not primary concerns of the respondents.

Notable similarities and differences appear between the two groups of respondents (see Table 1). From the data, "time for partnership activities" not only ranked highest overall, but highest for both the respondents active in partnerships and those inactive.

For those involved in partnerships, "communication between partners," "difficulties planning objectives," "reaching agreements between partners" and "promotion of successful partnership activities" were indicated by the respondents to be the greatest barriers.

These barriers were not as important to those respondents without partnerships. In fact, none of the respondents without partnerships mentioned barriers relating to either reaching agreements or promotion of activities. The second and third highest ranking concerns of respondents not involved in partnership activities are "information about other successful partnerships" and "initial forming of relationships/contacting interested parties."

The difference in responses between the two groups can be attributed to their relative stages in partnership development. Those that have partnerships have made the initial contacts and are attempting to improve the relationship whereas the respondents without partnerships have not made the crucial initial contacts.

Table 1
Survey Responses

Summary of the responses to the partnership survey. Categories in rank order of the total response frequency. (n = 96 responses; see Note a)

	Total Frequency	Respondent Involved in a Partnership		
		Yes	No	Not Indicated (b)
Time for partnership activities	43 (1)	18 (1)	19 (1)	6
Leadership from superiors or colleagues of respondent	30 (2)	16 (2)	11 (4)	3
Information about other successful partnerships	29 (3)	12 (7)	15 (2)	2
Difficulties planning objectives	24 (4)	15 (3.5)	7 (5)	2
Funding	19 (5)	13 (5)	5 (6)	1
Reaching agreements between partners	17 (6)	15 (3.5)	0 (15)	2
Initial forming of relationships	14 (7.5)	0 (15)	12 (3)	2
Promotion of successful partnership activities	14 (7.5)	14 (5)	0 (15)	0
Lack of personnel to carry out partnership activities	13 (9)	8 (9)	4 (7)	1
Communication between partners	12 (10)	11 (8)	1 (11)	0
Release time from employment for partnership activities	7 (11)	4 (10.5)	3 (8.5)	0

Lack of employee involvement in the partnership	6 (12)	3 (12)	3 (8.5)	0
Training/lack of experience in partnerships	4 (13)	4 (10.5)	0 (15)	0
Lack of teacher involvement in the partnership	3 (14)	2 (13)	1 (11)	0
Transportation to partnership meetings	2 (15)	1 (14)	1 (11)	0
Column totals	237	136	82	19

Note. Rank of response category given in parentheses.

(a) Some respondents had concerns in more than one response category.

(b) Respondents who did not indicate partnership involvement if any. These responses are not ranked.

Focusing on the concerns of respondents without partnerships, the second highest ranking category, "information about other successful partnerships," indicates that these persons are interested in information to help initiate partnerships. This is supported by the fact that the third ranking concern was "initial forming of relationships." "Leadership from superior or colleagues" was ranked number four. If this is, as it appears to be, a concern related to forming partnerships, then it is misplaced. The Triangle Coalition (1986) notes that "anyone who is actively concerned with improving science and technology education can initiate a local alliance." The data indicate that people will participate in partnerships. The categories "lack of teacher involvement in the partnership" and "lack of employee involvement in the partnership" were ranked very low by those involved in partnerships. Thus, neither appears to be a barrier for respondents involved in partnerships, supporting the conclusion that people will participate in partnerships.

For the respondents involved in partnerships, the second highest concern was "leadership from superiors or colleagues." The comments on the survey indicate that the response categories of "funding" and "promotion of successful partnership activities" were related to a global concern of interacting with a partner. If this is true, then the second through the eighth highest ranking categories are all related to partner interaction (four of the response categories in this group were

intended to address partner interaction). This indicates that 80 of the 138 (almost 60 percent) responses from those persons involved in partnerships are concerned with interacting with the partner.

Summary

The level of response to open ended questions indicates that there are some very strong feelings towards partnerships. The goal of the survey reported here was to discover what concerns people have about partnerships and for the Iowa Alliance for Science to use this information to help facilitate partnerships.

In summary, for those interested in initiating a partnership, the Triangle Coalition's 1986 booklet is suggested. Once the partnership is started, the interaction of everyone involved is of primary importance. In a postscript to the survey, a respondent from the business community said it is "too easy to maintain [the] status quo."

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