



Church - School Partnership Guide



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Why Partner With a School?

1. Not to Convert but because We are Converted

2. **The Example of Jesus** ministering to people at the “intersection of the community” like the well, the Temple, etc. The school is the intersection of modern-day communities.

3. The Need ¹

- a. 1 out of 5 children in the US lives in poverty.
- b. 2 out of 5 children in the US live in a single-parent home.
- c. American children are more likely to be murdered, poor, pregnant, drug-dependent, or incarcerated than the children of any other industrialized country.
- d. Their ability to learn is seriously impaired if they do not have a relationship with at least one adult who cares.

4. The Potential Impact

- a. Impact on individual children: Hope, academics, self-esteem, greater chance of high school graduation, reduction in discipline problems, truancy, crime, pregnancy, drugs/alcohol, etc.
- b. Impact on individual families: Hope, less stress, help with other needs you’ll discover after you’ve established trust.
- c. Impact on the whole community: Hope, lower crime, healthier community members, connection point into the greater community.

5. The Benefits for Your Congregation

- a. This is something that’s scalable to any size church.
- b. A huge variety of gifts can be used (e.g. administrative, relational, prayer, encouragement, acts of service, etc.) so most people in your congregation are likely to find something that fits their SHAPE.
- c. Your service builds trust with the families, the school, the school district, the city, local businesses, etc. for future outreach opportunities.

¹ Kids Hope USA’s *An Introduction* booklet

How Do We Choose a School Partner?

- ❑ Check the “Opportunities” page of www.unitethechurch.org for a list of schools that need a church partner.
- ❑ Look into the school located nearest your church campus. This will increase the odds of your congregation being involved there on an on-going basis.
- ❑ Look at <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/tapr/2013/srch.html?srch=C> or other sources for the numbers and percentage of children in the free/reduced lunch program, children with limited English proficiency, with special education needs, etc.
- ❑ Is the principal receptive? Unless your whole school district is already set up to partner with churches, it’s best to start with an individual principal. Make sure he/she knows where this is being done successfully. Look at www.unitethechurch.org – “Serve” – “Education” – “See the Church-School Partnership List” for examples that are already in place.
- ❑ If the principal of your first choice isn’t receptive to partnering with a church, see if someone who goes to your church is a teacher or active parent at another school and might be able to help get volunteers plugged in there. Either way, continue to pray for God to work in the heart of the first principal and continue to follow-up.
- ❑ If all else fails, ask the city government or school district if they know of a school that would benefit from an infusion of volunteers.

How Can We Serve the School?

Before you determine what your partnership should look like:

1. Find out what the principal's dreams are for their school, what the school's assets are, and what their highest priority needs are. Coordinate a meeting with the principal and/or community liaison to discuss the dreams they have for their school.
**One thing you should know up front: low-income schools often don't have a PTA.*
2. Build trust by starting small and dreaming big. Under-promise and over-deliver.
3. Look for ways to serve the school that will build a long-term relationship but will also empower the children, parents, and staff to eventually become all God has created them to be rather than creating dependence on you.
4. Look for ways to increase parent involvement as much as possible. While a common stereo-type of a low-income parent is that he/she doesn't want to be involved in the child's schooling, often that's not the case.
 - Sometimes he/she doesn't feel welcome; instead, he/she feels judged. Work with the teachers and staff on ways to overcome this.
 - Other parents have difficulty being at the school during school hours because of long work hours or conflicting shifts. Be creative with ways for these parents to be involved.

Below are some ways a church can serve a local public school:

Needed but Less relational and empowering:

- Pray for the children, parents & staff - www.momsintouch.org.
- Do landscaping or facilities projects (e.g. windows, painting, etc.).
- Have school supply, underwear, or first aid supply drives at the beginning and/or middle of the school year.
- Provide holiday meals, gifts, etc. for staff and/or families.
- Appreciate teachers with notes, gifts, snacks, a meal, party, etc.
- Purchase values-based curriculum (e.g. www.coreessentials.org) for the school.
- Purchase school uniforms (if needed) or gym/music equipment.
- Provide prizes/awards for good behavior.
- Provide teacher assistance (e.g. making copies, grading, etc.).
- Offer your church building for teacher work-days, etc.

More relational and empowering:

- Coordinate and/or sponsor socials, festivals, assemblies, etc.
- Provide on-going training or special seminars (e.g. leadership, internet safety, debt management, ESL, technology) for students and/or parents (e.g. www.lincnt.org).
- Provide after-school programs (e.g. clubs, piano lessons, chorus, etc.).
- Evening/weekend/vacation meals for children on free/reduced lunch.
- Start or help with Saturday school.
- Offer to meet personal needs of the families (e.g. home repair, etc.).
- Participate in Lemonade Day (<http://dallas.lemonadeday.org/>)

Provide reading buddies/tutors and/or lunch buddies/mentors.

**This is the most relational and empowering option.*

How Do We Start a Mentoring Program?

1. Identify a liaison – a high-level volunteer who will serve as your connection point to the school.
2. Find out if the school already has a mentoring program that they would just like for you to plug volunteers into.
3. Look at existing models and decide whether or not you want to partner with a third-party organization or create your own program. Consider
 - (1) How many things you’re going to try to do for the school and (2) The capacity of your liaison. If you have a liaison who has experience running a mentoring program and quite a bit of time to volunteer, you may not need help from a third-party. If your liaison has less time or experience or you want to do a lot in addition to mentors, consider asking a third-party to help with the mentoring piece.

Program/Website	Provides Curriculum for Use/ Review	* Provides Program Coordinator	Trains/ Supports Your Liaison	Trains Your Volunteers	Contact
www.BigBrothersBigSisters.org	Yes	Yes	Yes (Free)	Yes (Free)	whall@bbbstx.org
www.KidsHopeUSA.org		No	Yes (\$2,500+)	No	lcook@kidshopeusa.org
www.MercyStreetDallas.org	Yes	W Dallas Only	W Dallas Only (Free)	W Dallas Only (Free)	sam@mercysreetdallas.org
www.ncaasi.org National Church Adopt-a-School Initiative of Dr. Tony Evans at Oak Cliff Bible		No	Yes (\$750)	Optional (\$100)	cwolford@ocbfchurch.org
www.SchoolWorksDFW.org	Yes	No	Irving Only (Free)	Irving Only (Free)	schools@irvingbible.org
www.championsofhopedallas.org	Yes	Yes	S Dallas Only (Free)	S Dallas Only (Free)	billy@championsofhope.org
Various church-developed models	Yes	No	Optional	Optional	

** Big Brothers, Big Sisters and Mercy Street provide a staff person who recruits, trains, and follows-up with your volunteers and makes/manages student/mentor matches allowing your church liaison to focus on other needs.*

4. Get a signed MOU (Memo of Understanding) clearly outlining the partnership. If you decide to partner with a third-party organization, make sure it is a 3-way partnership between the school, the church, and the organization.

How Does This Fit In With Unite?

1. Unite is a diverse network of churches joining forces to engage and transform our communities for God's glory and the advancement of His Kingdom. We believe that church-school partnerships may be the most strategic way to engage and transform our communities for the reasons described on page 3:
 - It meets a real and felt need in the community.
 - The potential impact is HUGE for individual children, families, and the whole community for generations to come.
 - This is something that's scalable to any size church.
 - A huge variety of gifts can be used (e.g. administrative, relational, prayer, encouragement, acts of service, etc.) so most people in your congregation are likely to find something that fits their SHAPE.
 - Your service and the results gain you credibility with the school district, the city, local businesses, etc. for future outreach opportunities.
2. Engaging other smaller, local churches (e.g. a church near the school or a church that speaks the language of some of the students) in a church-school partnership is a wonderful way to see more churches engaged in community ministry which is one of the major purposes of Unite.
3. Unite will provide churches with schools interested in a partnership, tools to help churches help the schools, as well as mentor churches who have worked with schools in the past.
4. Unite sponsors educational forums (Movement Day) and creates a learning community for every church serving in their partnered school(s).

What About Separation of Church & State?

While the words "Separation of Church and State" are not actually found in the Constitution or its Amendments, the idea of mixing an organized group of Christians and public schools make many Americans nervous. Here are some facts:

- "[In] the *Congressional Records from June 7th through September 25th, 1789 (when they framed the first amendment) the founders explained clearly [that their intent was to avoid] the establishment by the Federal Government of one single domination and the exclusion of all others.*"²
- In recent years, the Federal Government has actually embraced faith-based initiatives, recognizing that faith-based groups are both well positioned and eager to help meet community needs. President George W. Bush created the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives on January 29, 2001, and President Barack Obama continued the program calling it the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships on February 5, 2009. Obama said, "There has been much talk about what our government's role should be during this period of economic emergency...But no matter how much money we invest or how sensibly we design our policies, the change that Americans are looking for will not come from government alone. There is a force for good greater than government. It is an expression of faith, this yearning to give back, this hungering for a purpose larger than our own, that reveals itself not simply in places of worship, but in senior centers and shelters, schools and hospitals, and any place an American decides."³

With all that said, volunteers should be trained to abide by the rules of the school at which they volunteer and to respect the beliefs and rights of the parents. They should not discuss religion or pray with anyone unless asked, but are free to answer any questions a child, staff member, or family member does ask.

² 1992 Video "Separation of Church and State," Wallbuilders, Inc., PO Box 397, Aledo, TX 76008

³ White House Press Release: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/ObamaAnnouncesWhiteHouseOfficeofFaith-basedandNeighborhoodPartnerships/