

chapter eight

Resources and Partnerships

*"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success."
– Henry Ford*

I GOT EVICTED LAST NIGHT

Concentrated areas where poverty exists are barriers to opportunity and growth for everyone living in these conditions. These neighborhoods are often defined as areas where at least 40% of residents are low-income, with high rates of unemployment, population turnover, and housing instability (*Delbert, 2020*).

ADOPT A COMMUNITY MINDSET

We have already discussed in previous chapters the financial burdens of not only the urban school system but also in the personal situations of families they serve. That is why it is important to establish relationships and networks to help you provide support and resources. Making your school a vibrant hub of intellectual stimulation and support requires a collective, collaborative effort among all stakeholders in your community: parent groups, businesses, corporations, religious institutions, social services agencies, local and federal governing bodies, local political leaders, and professional organizations. These affiliations can help with some of your school's needs such as school supplies, technology, after-school enrichment, and more. These partners can also be added support systems for your families with health care, housing, personal enrichment, mental

health, and other wrap-around services. Below is a description of a few of my community partners and how they were used to provide support and services to families. Consider soliciting equitable partners like these in your area:

Henry Ford Health Systems / Cooking Classes

3% of all households with children, and 7.5% of low-income families with children, experience food insufficiency (Casey, Szeto, Lensing, Bogle & Weber, 2001). Several demographic and characteristic differences were observed between the food-sufficient and food-insufficient low-income groups. The results showed it did not matter whether low SES families had food or not, they still had minimal nutritional value, resulting in obesity or malnutrition. Educating families on how to prepare nutritious meals can have an impact on health, welfare, and achievement.

Henry Ford Health System is a health care provider offering education and resources to the community around the prevention of heart disease and other chronic illnesses. This partner sent registered dietitian nutritionists and chefs to the school to teach a six-week cooking class to parents. During each class, parents received two hours of cooking instruction on how to prepare healthy meals on a budget. At the end of each class, families received all the groceries to prepare the meal at home. The class ended with a grocery store challenge where parents received a small amount of cash to buy groceries to prepare a healthy meal. The class was usually held in the morning or after school to accommodate varying schedules of up to 20 participants.

Contact your local community health organizations for the types of programs they offer to educate your community on healthy eating habits. These are usually non-profit organizations that will have minimal or no cost.

Meijer Superstores

Meijer provides charitable support to organizations that align with their mission. To apply for assistance, stop by your local Meijer Customer Service desk to ask for a *Donation Request Form* (see **Sample Templates**). You will need a copy of your 501(c)3 letter and number, as well as a prepared proposal to submit with your donation request form:

Our donations from Meijer include:

- Turkeys to families for the holidays
- Donations of technology for the school's digital café
- Toys for the holidays

If you do not have a Meijer Superstore near you, check other large chain grocery stores for their community giving initiatives.

Detroit Mercy Dental and Delta Dental

Children living in poverty have about five times more untreated dental decay than children from higher income families (*GAO Report, 2000*). The University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry has been our active school partner for years, providing teeth cleaning, sealants, and dental hygiene products for low-income students and their families. I have both used their mobile truck and have converted a classroom into a dental office to accommodate a higher number of students faster. The dental students are responsible for collecting the students for the cleanings and returning them to class. Additionally, students and their parents who have more severe dental needs are able to go directly to the Dental School for advanced care.

Chances are your school may already have a dental provider. You may consider choosing your provider based on their follow-up services and incentives—like bikes and technology they gift students—to encourage them to return consent forms. Families also had opportunities to continue services through their clinics. Make sure you negotiate with your dental provider to maximize what they are offering to your students.

Negotiate with your dental group to provide the following:

- Dental hygiene products for all staff and students
- Incentives for teachers to collect consent forms
- Incentives for students to return consent forms
- Follow-up care at their school or facility
- Cleaning for staff members
- Sealants for students

Neighborhood Grocery Stores

Neighborhood grocery stores make the best partners due to familiarity and ease of access for local residents. Often these stores are family owned, hire

from the surrounding neighborhood, engage and support local churches and other community organizations, and provide financial assistance by extending credit. Neighborhood stores also serve as a financial hub for check cashing, bill payments, and money wire transfer services.

Make a connection with your local grocery store by:

- Going to the store in person, introducing yourself to the manager / owner.
- Taking postcards or brochures about your school.
- Patronizing the grocery store when the school makes purchases (class parties, parent events, etc.). Showing you support them will increase the likelihood they will support you.
- Offering incentives such as passing out their weekly flyers to parents or acknowledging them on your website or social media pages.

Toys for Tots

Since 1947, *Toys for Tots*, organized by the United States Marine Corps Reserve, has been distributing toys to children whose parents cannot afford to buy them gifts for Christmas.

Sharing the *Toys for Tots* distribution sites with parents is a good way to make sure no child is forgotten during the holiday season. However, go the extra mile to contact the *Toys for Tots* donation centers to find out if you can provide support using some of your parent volunteers. Non-profit organizations are always looking for free help, and your parents will be more than willing if it means they get first dibs at toys for their children.

City Coalition Foundations / Health Fair

City coalitions are usually made up of leaders from various groups, churches, and other organizations in your city who have come together to form a stronger voice and network for communities.

Find coalitions in your area who have a mission for supporting schools and ask them to provide assistance with:

- Job Fairs
- Health Fairs
- Volunteers
- Community Coat Drives

- Neighborhood Blight & Park Clean-up
- Urban Gardens
- Job Programs for Felons

Faith-Based Organizations

Faith-based organizations are typically one of the most stable pillars in your community. Partnerships with churches can assist with valuable resources that help minimize the achievement gap. They can assist with a wide range of services, including the use of a congregation's facilities or helping with support drives. Services may also include mentoring or tutoring programs, and services aimed to strengthen the family dynamic. Strengthening the family connection to its surrounding community has the potential to increase parent and family involvement, and creates opportunities to enrich students' lives outside of school.

Ask churches to extend invitations for special services, giveaways, dinners, plays, and summer programs to your families.

Local Health Department

Your local health department offers public health services and screenings to residents for little or no cost. It is a great resource for free immunizations, family planning, flu shots, mental health, and more.

Salvation Army / Programs for Utility Assistance

The Salvation Army is a Protestant Christian church and an international charitable organization that provides support to people who have fallen on hard times. The organization offers help to the elderly, the young, offenders, drug addicts, and people with disabilities. They provide food and shelter for the homeless and operate food distribution centers. The Salvation Army is active in virtually every corner of the world and serves in more than 100 countries.

Call the Salvation Army and request that a representative come to your school to share resources with your families on utility bill assistance, holiday assistance, and grant-funded programs that help low-income families with housing and other personal needs.

Good Fellows Boxes

The Good Fellows Club was founded in 1917 by a group of men at the Second Presbyterian Church, and has been helping families with emergency assistance

for over 100 years. They supply gift boxes every holiday season based on recipients who fill out an application for support.

Around the beginning of the school year, contact your local Good Fellows organization to send you application forms to distribute for your school community. You can also put the online link on your school web pages and social media platforms. Gift boxes can be delivered to family homes or the school.

In-Kind Services

In-kind contributions are donations of goods, services, or time—instead of cash—donated by groups such as corporations, small businesses, vendors, colleges, individual professionals, or tradespeople.

For instance, I partnered with a large, local law firm that sent attorneys to help parents with record expungement, divorce advice, and driver license reinstatement. Another time, an investment company sent employees to teach students about the stock market and the importance of financial literacy.

These relationships become important to your community. Make sure you connect with your school or district's business or accounting office on their policies of using in-kind services.

Leverage Stakeholder Relationships

Sometimes, stakeholders such as school board members, vendors, staff, and parents, may have jobs, expertise, or know someone who can be a valuable asset to your school. Leverage those relationships!

EXAMPLES:

- The School Management Company CEO belongs to the Corvette Club, and his club members adopted 30 families for the holidays.
- The President of our School Board is also the Vice President of a soft drink company. His company supplies drinks and food for many of our events.
- A parent had a philanthropist friend who paid for 10 seniors to go on the senior trip.
- A teacher had a relative who was a podiatrist, who donated 100 pairs of new shoes to students.
- The school Superintendent belongs to a fraternity. His organization adopted 20 families for the holidays.

Banking Institutions

Banks also have community initiatives and agendas to get more people to patronize their bank, and you can use their agenda to your advantage. Ask the neighborhood bank to come once a week to open and manage student accounts. Our students were able to open bank accounts with as little as \$5. Every week the bank would send representatives to provide student banking services, along with small gifts as incentives to students for opening accounts. This is a great way to teach math and money management.

Local Police Departments

Strong relationships between police agencies and the communities they serve are critical to maintaining public safety and trust. Some kids growing up in poverty do not always see law enforcement as a source of safety and protection. Programs that engage youth with law enforcement are a great way to get kids and their families familiar with local enforcement officers. Programs such as police explorers / cadets, police athletic leagues, citizen police academies specifically for youth, and mentorship programs are good examples of how youth can collaborate with law enforcement and change their perception.

Most precincts have a Community Officer. Find out who he / she is for your neighborhood and establish a relationship. Our Community Officer makes random visits to the school and aids with drug-related issues, theft, CPS situations, and more.

Check with your local Police & Fire Departments for:

- Police explorers / cadet programs
- Police athletic leagues
- Citizen police academies specifically for youth
- Mentorship programs
- Shop with a Cop
- Fire / Safety visits
- Free smoke detectors
- Halloween parties
- Food / coat drive locations
- Presence for special events
- Support at dismissal

Inquire about *Shop with a Cop* early in the year to see if you can get some of your students in that program. It is a wonderful way to involve students with law enforcement while providing holiday services.

Political Leaders

Invite your local political leaders to come to your school to bump elbows with parents for COVID-safe meet-and-greets or invite them to be a guest speaker for virtual workshops and meetings. While you cannot endorse any particular candidate during an election, inviting the Mayor, City Council members, and U.S. and state senators and representatives to visit your school is a great way to build a relationship. Communicate to them the challenges in the neighborhood and get them to put you on the agenda for community-related meetings.

Relationships like these have helped get street lights and stop signs in high-traffic areas where students cross busy roads, clean up neighborhood parks, get extra police visibility at neighborhood party / liquor stores where drug dealing is prominent, and fix issues with utility lines / poles that may cause hazards, and more.

America's Best Value Inn

Over the years working as the Homeless Liaison, I have encountered situations where a parent, mostly women fleeing an abusive partner, have asked the school for refuge. Oftentimes, people living in poverty have burned bridges from family members and friends and truly have no place to go. In these rare instances, having resources to call will prevent the families from sleeping in the car. In my area, America's Best Value Inn is privately owned and willing to assist with billing me for ***McKinney-Vento*** families. They have kitchens and are competitively priced with daily or weekly rates. The management of independently owned properties, even those connected to a chain, also has the flexibility to work with you on pricing. As I previously stated in the ***McKinney-Vento*** chapter, I only do this in rare instances, for a maximum of three days. I make it very clear to the family that after three days they must have other options or be prepared to cover the cost.

How to add a motel as a community partner:

- Search for independently owned properties in a chain, as they can be more flexible with their level of support and rates.
- Ask for the Manager or Owner. Introduce yourself as a school official in person or by phone and explain why you need them as a partner.
- Make arrangements to pay by phone with a credit card.
- Make sure the motel is in a safe location.
- Try to make sure it has a fridge and microwave; this makes it convenient for families to buy food to cook.
- Let them know that you are only paying for three days; after that the family is responsible for payment.
- Absolutely explain to your Business Office why you have incurred hotel expenses on the school budget. I don't have to explain why that is important!

Non-Profit Organizations

A not-for-profit organization does not earn any profits for its owners. Instead, the organization donates the money it receives to help fund the organization's objectives and goals.

Look for specific non-profit organizations that have a mission to provide services to low-income communities in the form of after-school enrichment programs, tutoring, personal development for low-income families, housing placement programs, drug rehabilitation, therapy, and more. Try to find organizations that have received federal grant money and are willing to provide the services for little to no cost.

Detroit had a revitalization program that received grant money to give to local residents wanting to open businesses. To help everyone get a fair shot, we partnered with a non-profit agency to teach a six-week business course on how to write a business plan, get an EIN, DBA papers, and other business basics. When the class was over, parents got certificates of completion and were ready to submit their proposals to banks and other financial institutions. This kind of education is priceless in how it can change a parent's economic circumstances. The parent could eventually become one of the school's major vendors.

Recruiting non-profit support:

- Look for organizations that have grant money they need to spend.
- You can Google *community foundations* in your area to get a list of organizations.
- Contact the organization by phone and send a letter explaining who you are, how many students you serve, and your mission. Explain what you need and be specific.
- Have the organization give you a proposal on the scope of services they will provide.
- Decide what kind of support you need and find a group with a mission that supports your needs. *For example, if you want to mentor a group of girls on confidence and esteem, you could research groups that mentor girls and recruit them to provide confidence-building, etiquette, and hygiene classes.*

Scholastic Book Fair

The relationship between level of education and poverty is clear. The National Institute for Literacy estimates that 43% of adults with very low literacy skills live in poverty. About 70% of adult social service recipients have lower level literacy skills on the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) (*Florida Literacy Coalition, n.d.*). The implementation of Michigan's *Read by Grade Three* law has put schools in a race to make sure all kids are reading at grade level by 3rd grade. Creating opportunities to excite students about reading is a wonderful way to increase test scores and literacy.

A book fair is a sales event which focuses on the sale of books. Book fairs may be stand-alone events or they may accompany a larger event, in which case they may be thematically related to the event. The *Scholastic Book Fair*[®] is a great opportunity to introduce books to students. The *Fair* is delivered in portable cases that open into shelves. Weeks prior to the arrival of the *Fair*, you will receive a Book Fair Kit. The Kit will include promotional posters and book preview flyers to get your students excited about attending. When the *Fair* arrives, students are given shopping hours to come and purchase books.

I have used book fairs for two purposes: to introduce kids to books and as a fundraiser. I double the profit from sales by taking what is called *Scholastic Dollars*[™] over the cash option. *Scholastic Dollars* allow me to buy more books for classroom libraries or holiday gifts. I call it giving the gift of literacy. Make sure

when preparing for your *Fair*, that you speak with your Book Fair Representative and ask for an abundance of \$1 items or discount books. This will ensure that your population will be able to afford them.

Strategies for a Book Fair:

- Select a space to house your *Book Fair* cases that you can lock every evening (a classroom works).
- Recruit volunteers you can trust. You will go through lots of cash.
- Have \$50 petty cash on hand to start.
- Don't take checks.
- Just stick to selling books.
- Request discount items and books for \$1.
- Have a *Book Fair Preview* for staff and students.
- Promote your fair via website, newsletters, and social media.
- Notice what is popular and re-order right away; you can usually get stock in 24 hours.
- Offer incentives to teachers if they bring their classes more than once.
- Take the *Scholastic Dollars*™, not the cash. You get more in *Scholastic Dollars*. They can then be used for classroom libraries and holiday gifts.

Vendors

Some schools have contracted private vendors / businesses that provide services like food, building maintenance, lawn services, snow removal, cleaning supplies, office supplies, tutoring, etc. In some cases, private vendor contracts can be pretty substantial. Do not hesitate to ask them for support with donations of food, school supplies, sponsorships, jobs for parents, etc.

How to ask vendors for support:

- Get approval from the Administrator. Often, they have already earmarked things they want vendors to support.
- Contact the vendor by phone, rather than in writing. Be specific, always include the school mission.
- Always take pictures from the vendor donations. People like to see how their money was spent.
- Follow up with thank you notes from students.

Be careful of quid pro quo! These requests are not contingent upon contractual agreements.

Uniform Stores

If you are an urban school with the expectation that students are in uniform every day, then you really need a relationship with a uniform store, preferably a local one.

Here are some advantages of having a local uniform store on your team:

- The uniforms are easily accessible to **MV** families and new students to the district—so that students do not miss days because they are out of uniform. Not having a uniform in low SES schools is sometimes used as an excuse for truancy.
- The uniform store will make sure to keep your uniforms in stock.
- Parents can go directly to the uniform store for proper size and fit.
- Parents can get uniforms at a discount.
- The store can invoice you once a month.

In the end, schools are public, democratic institutions supported by tax dollars. They should be more than a place where classes and extracurricular activities are held. Your school can be a source of information, resources, programs, and activities that promote well-being and uplift not only students, but also their families, neighborhoods, and entire communities.

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

At the time of this writing, the COVID-19 Pandemic is entering a new wave of increasing infections worldwide, while at the same time schools are attempting a variety of practices and models to continue educating students and engaging families amidst these unprecedented challenges. Changes to health, education, and regulatory policies and practices are changing rapidly and frequently as we continue through the development and publication process of *Did You Bring a Bed Bug to School Today? How to Cultivate an Emotionally Safe Environment for Students in Urban Communities/The Urban Toolkit*. Therefore, in order to provide the best possible information at the time of actual publication—and create an effective single-source COVID-19 reference—we have decided to place all COVID-19 related materials in a dedicated section at the end of this book.

Please check the COVID-19 section at the end of this book for any additional materials or templates related to this chapter.

For the most up-to-date information on the COVID-19 Pandemic, please check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

