School-Community Partnerships Study

Citizens Advisory Committee

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Study Objectives

1. Identify strategies school districts can use to create partnerships within the community to expand K-12 student learning outside the walls of the classroom.

2. Explore best practices in different grade levels to expose students to authentic and relevant learning experiences in their areas of interest/passion.

Methodology and Research

1. Build knowledge of what is currently happening in Wyoming City Schools to identify opportunities to build upon and ensure against overlap through:

   - Meetings with a school administrator at each level.

   - Surveys were sent to Wyoming Middle School and Wyoming High School teachers (Appendix A and B).

   - Information and feedback were gathered from primary staff through email and conversations (Appendix A).

2. Conducted literature reviews and interviews with local school district leaders and university faculty to identify best strategies and exemplary models of successful school-community partnerships (Appendix C).

Findings

Summary of Staff Feedback

Summary of staff feedback to question #3) *"What would you love to implement that would create partnerships that expand K-12 student learning outside the walls of the classroom?"* and question #4) *"How can we, as a district, expose students to additional authentic and relevant learning experiences in their areas of interest/passion?"*

- Provide staff with a list of community member career speakers willing to collaborate with teachers
- Create partnership between clubs and businesses
- Provide more service-learning opportunities/service days
- Connect foreign language programs with sister schools
- More cultural events
- Shine a light on staff that have talents outside their teaching content
- Maintain or increase budgets for trips, clubs, and programs
- Provide students with more work study and internship opportunities
- Revisit the possibility of flex time
- Establish more "buddy" programs within the schools
- Bimonthly school/community book talks focused on diversity

Best Practices for Creating and Maintaining Successful Partnerships

- Presence of strong leadership and inviting school culture across district and divisions
- Community strengths and shared values serve as foundation
- Strategic, authentic relations are intentionally fostered
- Diversity and innovative solutions are embraced
- Benefits are reciprocal and mutually beneficial
- Clear vision for outcomes, accountability, and success
- Shared commitment to student success and allocation of resources
- Internal and external trust established
- Involves intentional instruction that connects learning to authentic, real-world issues and/or service
- Provides sustained opportunities rather than one-time, isolated experiences
- Opportunities for student agency and voice are embedded throughout
- Effective collaboration and communication with (and about) community partners is essential

Focus Areas for Fostering School Community Partnerships

1. Instructional Design
2. Student Choice
3. Internships
4. Community Organizations & Family Engagement

Instructional Design

Project-Based Learning: Students learn through questions and tasks connected to real-world issues. When done effectively, it can help test scores, improve student engagement, and foster 21st Century learning skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.

Service-Learning: More than just isolated community service activities; rather, it is intentional instruction that connects to learning standards while encouraging students to be engaged with the community.

Exemplary Models:

1. A Colorado high school designed a service-learning unit titled **Visions and Voice of Hope: Homeless as Humans** where "classes immersed themselves in reading newspaper articles, poetry and other non-fiction sources about the issue of homelessness, both locally and nationally. Guest speakers from local agencies visited the class to provide authoritative information. Many classes also participated in tours of Urban Peak, Marion House and Ecumenical Social Ministries. Student-driven projects included creating informational brochures and videos, along with a fundraising movie

night to collect socks. Students honed their comprehension, persuasive writing and reflection skills while being challenged to look at the world around them."

2. **Columbus City Schools and The Ohio State University College of Education** partnered to allow teachers to enroll in graduate courses and receive mini-grants to create community projects with students. In one project, students investigated how improper disposal of hazardous materials affected water quality in the community.

3. A high school in Iowa hosts an annual **Partner Palooza**, where community organizations pitch project ideas to students.

Student Choice

Though challenges exist (time, ambiguity, perceived loss of control), those challenges are outweighed by the benefits. Student choice results in: creating lifelong learners not passive consumers; developing skills, including decision making, self-regulation, time management, and organization; increased intrinsic motivation and effort; and greater ownership of work.

Exemplary Models:

1. **Enigma Missions @ Wooranna Parks Primary School**

2. **GO!Time at Indian Hill Elementary School** (Grades 3-5)
   GO = Grow Ourselves
   30-minutes at the end of each day (T-F; Mindful Monday)
   Teachers plan and present their quarter-long topic/unit to the administrator. Students are presented with options and select their top 5 choices. Teachers meet as a grade level to assign students to a class based on their choices and other factors. Teachers can change or repeat their unit each quarter.

Internships

High school students and local businesses benefit from collaborative partnerships. Students gain marketable skills in a field of interest, attain valuable work experience in real world settings, and network and connect with organizations not typically available to them. Businesses enjoy reduced or free labor, leverage the opportunity to shape their future workforce, and fill their pipeline with potential candidates. Positive community engagement is good public relations.

Exemplary Models:

1. **Mt. Healthy City School District and LSI Industries Inc. of Blue Ash** started a new program with 22 seniors participating. Students assemble LED light fixtures, perform quality-based testing, fulfill orders, and ship to

consumers. The schedule allows a.m. class time and work after lunch. For some students, this can lead to permanent placement after graduation. The district is now pursuing additional partnerships to grow the program. The district is searching for businesses and positions that complement a STEM curriculum.

2. **Noblesville High School (Indianapolis metro area) Career Exploration and Internship Program** began in 2013 with 22 students/11 business partners and has grown to 325 students and 111 business partners. Concrete planning for internships is built into the junior year curriculum. Based upon interest, some students take course work and log required work hours toward professional certifications in nursing (CNA), pharmacy technician, automotive technician, and building trades. The district is a member of the larger Noblesville initiative, a community-wide effort to retain local talent as evidenced in their campaign "Stay Here, Grow Here." In addition to career exploration, the program is dedicated to helping students develop 12 identified professional "soft skills": Initiative, Teamwork, Flexibility, Honesty, Respect, Commitment, Communication, Attitude, Dependability, Motivation, Problem Solving, and Determination.

Community Organizations & Family Engagement

Exemplary Models:

1. The partnership between **Living with Change, a locally-founded nonprofit organization, and Indian Hill Exempted Village School District** was established to help ensure a safer, more inclusive school climate for transgender youth. The partnership has helped guide internal and external conversations within the school community on topics related to gender identity and expression, issues of equity, unconscious bias, suicide awareness and prevention, and more. The partnership offers a safe, confidential source for information, resources, and referrals, as needed, within their school community and serves as a resource to the school district around policies and procedures. Living with Change is a trusted source for consultation and guidance on how to handle situations around related topics and themes in appropriate and sensitive ways that help more effectively create a safer school climate and culture for teaching and learning.

2. The **Indian Hill Exempted Village School District Parent Equity Group** was initiated to enhance mutual trust and engagement across the school community through intentional, planned conversations, and use of structured protocols. The Parent Equity Group has now evolved into parent-led monthly meetings, strategically held at 6 p.m. before board meetings with the assistant superintendent and principals regularly attending. This group has facilitated a

culture for conversations, problem-solving, and partnerships around a range of topics, including education, decision-making, diversity, race, class, privilege, social justice, equity, and inclusion. This partnership enhances communications, shared perspective taking, collaborations between school and home, and development of a "collective voice" within the district, across, division, and within families and others in the school community. Additionally, this partnership has fostered improved school climate, student-led affinity groups for effective critical conversations and dialogue. This model could provide opportunities for Wyoming's on-going One Degree Shift work and developing partnerships with the Parent Advisory Committees and other Wyoming community groups.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We believe that while there are some programs and projects in place within WCS that embrace school-community partnerships (Appendix A), there is significant room for growth. We recommend that WCS consider restructuring course content, offerings, scheduling, and delivery methods to provide and expose students to intentionally designed, authentic, and relevant learning experiences in their areas of interest/passion.

Following are six specific action steps that we recommend the Board pursue:

1. Develop internship possibilities at the high school level.
2. Provide faculty and staff at all levels with a list of career speakers/community members who are willing to collaborate with schools.
3. Encourage service-learning projects across all three divisions. Provide professional development opportunities and access to funding resources.
4. Incorporate scheduled time at every level for students to explore their interests. Depending on grade level, this could mean time for passion projects, independent studies, more options for specials, or additional electives.
5. Explore ways to fund current and additional club offerings.
6. Develop a district-wide Parent Equity Group model within WCS.