



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

- 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.

How Do We Choose a School Partner?

- Check with the Associated Churches Community Connector for a list of schools that need a church partner. Priority schools are the more complex, high need schools. Community Connector will identify the numbers and percentage of children in the free/reduced lunch program, children with limited English proficiency, with special education needs, etc.
- The Community Connector will look into the school located nearest your church campus if it is a complex school first. This will increase the odds of your congregation being involved there on an ongoing basis.
- Connector will make contact with school to determine the principal's receptivity. Unless your whole school district is already set up to partner with churches, we will start with an individual principal. If there are roadblocks, we could identify someone who goes to your church that may be a teacher or active parent at that school or 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, the community connector will ask the school district if they know of a school that would benefit from an infusion of volunteers
- Once an interested school is identified, the connector will make sure the Principal or Administrator knows where this is being done successfully. They will schedule a meeting with all parties to do conduct a Needs Assessment to identify the number of staff, students, physical, academic, and social-emotional needs.
- Once the needs are identified, agreement is made between school and church regarding the needs the church is willing to support. At that time, the church will identify a primary contact person to communicate with school to plan activities and garner support from the church to aid in said needs or projects.

How Do 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. Serve as a community liaison to connect the school to helpful resources.
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 can feel 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 SCHOOL: Needed but Less relational and empowering:

- Pray for the children, parents & staff.
- 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.
- Prepare holiday meals, gifts, etc. for staff and/or families.
- Adopt families for the holidays and provide gifts
- Appreciate teachers with notes, gifts, snacks, a meal, party, etc.
- Purchase values-based curriculum (e.g. <http://www.characterfirsteducation.com/c/>) 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, family game nights with meal and prizes
- Have a serve day at the school (meet with school contact person for projects)
- Greet at Back-to-School Nights

How Can We Serve the School?

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.
- Provide after-school programs (e.g. clubs, piano lessons, chorus, etc.). Your members will have to pass a background check with the district and complete the schools volunteer application.
- Evening/weekend/vacation meals for children on free/reduced lunch.
- Offer to meet personal needs of the families (e.g. home repair, etc.).
- Provide reading buddies/tutors and/or lunch buddies/mentors. ****This is the most relational and empowering option.***

How To Start a Mentoring/Tutoring Program with School.

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 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
 - How many things you're going to try to do for the school and
 - 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 component.

Existing School and Third-Party Programs:

- **Study Connection Site** for Fort Wayne Community Schools - This is FWCS's award-winning volunteer tutoring program. Each year more than 500 students receive one hour of one-to-one tutoring services from volunteers at more than 50 local businesses and churches. <https://www.fortwayneschools.org/studyconnection?page=2>
- Volunteers that need to be screened as a "Comprehensive" Volunteer, please contact Community Programs at 467-8810 to receive the application link. Examples of Comprehensive Volunteers: Volunteering to assist with FWCS school sanctioned swim lessons, Overnight trips/camp, Zoo Field Trips, Show Choir, Marching Band, and Study Connection Tutor.

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters** (Lunch Buddies/Real Men Read) – 1005 W. Rudisill Blvd. Fort Wayne, IN 46807, Toll Free - (888)456-1600, Phone - (260)456-1600.
- **Project Reads** (Allen County Educational Partnership - 1005 W Rudisill Blvd., Suite 308, Fort Wayne, IN 46807, Telephone: (260) 423-6447
- **Neighbor Link** (Have Neighbor Link to assist with planning your schools service project) 2826 S Calhoun St, Fort Wayne, IN 46807, Telephone: (260) 209-0074; Website: <https://www.nlfw.org/>
- **United Way** (Day of Caring) - 334 E. Berry St., Fort Wayne, IN 46802 Phone: 260.422.4776; Website: <https://www.unitedwayallencounty.org/volunteer>
- **Junior Achievement of Northern Indiana** (JA Biz Town Volunteer for school JA Day) 550 E Wallen Rd, Fort Wayne, IN 46825; Phone: (260) 484-2543 Website: <https://www.juniorachievement.org/web/junior-achievement-of-northern-indiana/>
- There are always special projects within the school that Community Connectors might be aware of. Please ask a Rising Stars Community Connector.

PARTNERSHIP EXPECTATIONS

Expectations of Church:

- Provide a primary and secondary contact person to communicate with school and provide feedback. In the event the contact person changes, please contact Associated Churches Community Connector with updated information to schedule meetings that all parties can meet.
- Determine three ways or times to engage with school per year. (For example, prayer, back-to-school supplies and staff appreciation gifts or meal)
- As a Rising Stars Partner church, we ask that the church provide feedback and information on in-kind donations, number of volunteers, activities, stories and pictures that we might be able to share the story to recruit more churches, agencies and present best practices.
- Attached Pdf with links for: In-Kind Donations, Partnership Interest Form (for new churches and agencies),

Expectation of Associated Churches:

- Serve as a liaison to building a bridge to the school on behalf of church.
- Training & Development for Volunteers
- Encouraging ongoing relationship, providing relevant and needed information in the area of engaging with public schools.
- Build a bridge to community resources and volunteers for the school

Expectation of Schools:

- Provide a primary contact person to communicate with Rising Stars Community Connector and church representative
- Complete an annual Needs Assessment and End of Year Feedback Assessment

- Provide school calendar
- Inform church of any schedule changes and needs
- Inform Rising Stars Connector and church of changes in staff, and transferring information on to new contact

How does this fit in with Associated Churches?

Rising Stars Adopt-a-School School Partnership 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 in this guide.

- 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 Rising Stars.

3. Rising Stars 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. Rising Stars sponsors educational forums and creates a learning community for every church serving in their partnered school(s).

Contact Persons:

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What About Separation of Church and 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.”
- In recent years the Federal Government has 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 Neighborhood Initiatives on January 29, 2001, and President Barack Obama continued the program calling it the Office of Faith-Based and Community partnerships on February 5, 2009. More recently, The Executive Order to establish the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships was signed by President Biden on February 14, 2021. 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.”
- More recently, the White House Partnership Office will promote partnerships with religious and secular neighborhood organizations to work with leaders of all faiths and backgrounds who are on the front lines of their communities, to help uplift, heal, and rebuild neighborhoods in crises.

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.