

# Brock International Prize In Education

**Carolyn Witt Jones**

**Executive Director**

**The Partnership for Successful Schools**

Nominated by:

Dr. Katharine W. Winograd

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**Carolyn Witt Jones**  
**Executive Director**  
**Partnership for Successful Schools**

Carolyn Witt Jones is a recognized leader in the national movement to improve the public education system through powerful and prolific partnerships that have proven to expedite significant, effective and efficient education reform.

Since 1991, Ms. Jones has consistently excelled in her role as executive director of the Partnership for Successful Schools, a statewide organization established by leaders of national corporations with strong ties to Kentucky's United Parcel Service, Ashland, Inc., and Humana, Inc. More than 50 leaders from education, business, civic and government groups across the state joined the Partnership and established a 10-year commitment that calls for successfully implementing and advancing significant education reform.

In 1998, the Partnership for Kentucky Schools earned the State Business Coalition of the Year Award from the National Alliance of Business for "business-led coalitions that have made outstanding contributions to improving student achievement at the state or local level."

Her organization also received the inaugural Leaders for Change Decade Award from the Council for Aid to Education, which said: "Rarely has the Council come across a program so bold, systemic, and long-lasting that it merits special acknowledgement."

Most recently, Ms. Jones received the National Education-Business Partnership Leader Award from the National Association of Partners in Education and McKee Food Corporation for being "the driving force behind the Partnership's consistent, targeted work to unite the diverse needs of education, business, and the community in support of Kentucky's schools."

Ms. Jones holds a B.A. in Elementary Education, an M.A. in Guidance and Counseling, and an honorary doctoral degree from Georgetown College in Lexington, Ky. Her professional experience in education spans more than 30 years. Prior to joining the Partnership for Kentucky Schools, she served as: an assistant and associate professor at the college level; director of planning for a large public school district; consultant for education and business in a variety of areas; and public elementary school teacher.



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## Nomination of Carolyn Witt Jones

September 1, 2009

With great conviction and immense appreciation for her groundbreaking contributions to the evolution of education in America, I am enthusiastically nominating the distinguished Carolyn Witt Jones for the prestigious Brock International Prize in Education.

I am confident that when you review her work, you will find her to be a very worthy candidate for the exceptionally honorable distinction of Brock Laureate.

Carolyn has devoted the last 46 years to the noble pursuit of advancing public education, beginning her career in 1963 as an elementary school teacher in Lexington, Ky. Her teaching career progressed through Georgetown College and the University of Kentucky as an assistant and associate professor before she became Director of Planning for Fayette County (Ky.) Public Schools (1986-91).

These rich educational experiences set the stage for her to become the leader and visionary of a trailblazing organization that has charted new and very effective ways forward in the cause to improve public education. Carolyn has been the executive director of the Partnership for Successful Schools, formerly the Partnership for Kentucky Schools, since its inception in 1991. In this role, she has distinguished herself as a prominent leader and innovator in the P-20 education movement, especially as a pioneer in forging powerful partnerships among education, community, economic development, workforce and government entities that have generated great momentum for fundamental change and improvement of schools nationwide.

"The Partnership is a national model for engaging communities and businesses as effective advocates for better schools," said Bill Porter, the former director of GrantMakers for Education and the former executive director of the Partnership for Learning in Portland, Oregon. "It has a single-minded focus, well-executed strategies, and an impressive track record that have served Kentucky students well."

In 1990, the chief executive officers of three major corporations – UPS, Ashland, Inc., and Humana, Inc. – expressed profound interest in contributing significantly to education reform in the state of Kentucky. Their devotion to participating in the cause led to the formation of the Partnership for Kentucky Schools. The vision for the organization was to look outside of the traditional education system and find new sources of support that could wield substantial influence on the improvement of public education while rallying public support for major education reform.

The vision was entrusted to a highly respected and visionary educator who was well known for framing the future of education in a new light. Carolyn Witt Jones was enlisted as the original executive director of the Partnership because of her reputation for promoting the improvement of education through powerful collaborations between education, business and community forces.

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"I give a lot of credit in this entire thing to Carolyn," said David Allen, former president of the Kentucky Education Association. "From my perspective as an educator, she was a credible figure to pull together educators and corporate interests."

Carolyn has worked closely with the three CEOs from UPS, Humana and Ashland, as well as more than 50 other leaders from education, business, civic and government groups to unify and focus their energies on improving the success of students.

The type of collaborative efforts that she has championed for many years and the momentum she has helped to create in the education reform movement is remarkable and continues to ripple across the country. Although it goes without saying that everybody inside and outside of the classroom in every community has a vested interest in the success of students, Carolyn has capitalized on that notion like few others to build sea-changing, public-private collaborations that effectively raise the quality of education, which in turn improves communities and spurs economic development.

With masterful teaching and communication skills, Carolyn has effectively articulated the underlying truth that the quality of education in a community directly affects the quality of the local economy and its workforce, the effectiveness of government, and the quality of life. Her persistent message on this truth has resonated and produced marvelous results.

Carolyn achieves results for the Partnership through a multi-pronged approach.

She works directly with school districts to identify specific student achievement initiatives, then develops strategic, research-based programs and policies that will ensure accountability and effectiveness while documenting progress and challenges. She employs expert communications and outreach strategies to create strong bonds and loyalties between schools and their communities, with strong emphasis on the engagement of local employers. With Carolyn working as the key intermediary and facilitator, the community and employers express their expectations of the education system and the educators express their needs from the community and employers to deliver the desired results.

Carolyn masterfully fosters the development of a strong, symbiotic relationship between schools, employers and the community that creates a powerful all-for-one and one-for-all philosophy. This, I believe strongly, is the foundation for creating the most effective support system for education at every level, from pre-kindergarten to graduate studies.

"The Partnership for Successful Schools is undoubtedly one of the most effective business support groups for education anywhere in the country and is a model for such organizations," said Bill McDiarmid, Boeing Professor of Teacher Education at the University of Washington. "The positive influence the Partnership has had on educational opportunities for Kentucky students is due to exceptional leadership and inclusive approaches to addressing challenges."

Through her leadership, the Partnership was recognized by the Council for Aid to Education with its first-ever Leaders for Change Decade Award. The Council issued this statement: "Rarely

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has the Council come across a program so bold, systemic, and long-lasting that it merits special acknowledgment."

Carolyn was also nationally recognized as the Outstanding Partnership Leader in the United States from the National Association of Partners in Education and McKee Foods Corp. for serving as "the driving force behind the Partnership's consistent, targeted work to unite the diverse needs of education, business and the community in support of Kentucky's schools."

"(The Partnership's) efforts, led by Carolyn Witt Jones, are recognized throughout the country for fostering a continuous improvement approach to student performance that has helped more students be prepared for higher education and the workplace," said Drew Scheberle, former leader of the Center for State Scholars in Austin, Texas, and currently senior vice president for education at the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce. "The Partnership's focus on enrolling more students in courses that prepare them for success through Kentucky Scholars, its involvement in the American Diploma Project to make sure those course standards are meaningful, and its results-driven involvement with eight school districts directly are a model for the rest of the nation."

Bill Porter, the former director of GrantMakers for Education and the former executive director of the Partnership for Learning in Portland called the Partnership for Kentucky Schools "a trailblazer."

A couple examples of programs that are making impacts on improving schools and student achievement, which are being shared with organizations focused on improving education around the country, include the Partnerships' "One To One" and "Kentucky Scholars" programs.

The One To One program was developed by Carolyn to engage and recruit community members and businesses in areas where there are significant numbers of students unable to read on grade level by third grade. Informed through communications and outreach from the Partnership, community members willing to volunteer to be reading coaches are provided comprehensive training on how a child learns and they're equipped with proven strategies that help struggling young students improve their reading skills. During the 2008-09 academic year in a specific region of Kentucky, the Partnerships matched 202 coaches with 202 struggling students in grades K-3. Of the students who were coached, 91 percent made continuous progress in reading achievement. Seventeen schools in six districts of this region participated in the program.

For fall 2009, 260 coaches in this particular region are registered to participate. In the region, 28 sponsors and partners have supported One To One either through donations or release time for employees to serve as reading coaches.

Another program championed by Carolyn is Kentucky Scholars. The program, which is part of the national State Scholars Initiative that now operates in 23 states, enlists the support of community leaders, influential employers and business owners who understand the importance of their participation in the cause to improve education. They speak directly to students in an effort to motivate them and inform them on the importance and value of pursuing a rigorous



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course of study. In the 2008-09 academic year, 28,000 students heard these messages from voices of influence. Kentucky Community and Technical College System, the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education and Columbia Gas of Kentucky have joined the cause to support Kentucky Scholars. Together, the program and its supporters are delivering a concerted and prolific message, informing students of the need to challenge themselves in high school in order to reach their ultimate goals for college and a career. It is creating a community dialogue that is amplifying the far-reaching importance of student success while fostering an exchange of best practices and success strategies that are being shared statewide and nationwide.

Most recently, Carolyn provided the leadership for a merger between the Partnership for Successful Schools and another non-profit organization, the New Cities Institute, a branch of the Kentucky League of Cities. This merger has broadened the Partnership's coalition with influential leaders who are committed to accelerating the academic achievement of all students, which in turn improves the quality of life for all. The merger enlists the leadership of mayors, county judge-executives, school superintendents and other influential community leaders who will assist in creating and implementing innovative community development models that continue to advance public education.

Many notable funders have found the Partnership's work worthy of significant support. Funders include the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, the Knight Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, Verizon Wireless and Toyota.

As a devoted advocate and active participant in the national P-20 education reform movement, I strongly believe that Carolyn has been a true pioneer and influential national force during this critical period in the history of American education. Her foresight and groundbreaking work has provided us all a blueprint for how to lift up the quality of education and the achievement of our students, not by putting the burden solely on teachers, students and schools, but through unifying friendly forces in the community to join the cause with great conviction.

Carolyn has devoted her professional life to the improvement of education and the success of students with historically significant impacts that I feel are worthy of the Brock Laureate distinction. I am extremely proud and honored to nominate Carolyn Witt Jones for this prestigious award.

**CAROLYN WITT JONES**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PARTNERSHIP FOR SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS**  
**600 COOPER DRIVE**  
**LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY**  
**859.455.9595**

**Education**

Georgetown College	2002
Honorary Doctorate of Letters	
University of Kentucky	1985-1990
Advanced work toward Doctorate in Education	
University of Kentucky	1985
Rank 1	
University of Kentucky	1973-1987
Graduate work in Reading/Language Arts	
Georgetown College	1963-1966
M.A., Guidance and Counseling	
Georgetown College	1959-1963
B.A., Elementary Education	

**Professional Experience**

Executive Director, Partnership for Successful Schools Lexington, Kentucky	1991-present
Director of Planning, Fayette County Public Schools Lexington Kentucky	1986-1991
Associate Professor, Georgetown College Georgetown, Kentucky	1986
Assistant Professor, Georgetown College Georgetown, Kentucky	1984-1986
Professional Leave: Research Breckinridge Elementary School, Lexington Cassidy Elementary School, Lexington Southern Elementary School, Lexington	1982-1984
Assistant Professor, Georgetown College Georgetown, Kentucky	1980-1982
Teacher/Coordinator of Student Teachers University of Kentucky Lexington, Kentucky	1970-1972
Instructor, Georgetown College Georgetown, Kentucky	1966-1969
Elementary Teacher, Fayette County public Schools Lexington, Kentucky	1963-1966

# CAROLYN WITT JONES

## Professional Activities

### A. Research/Production

Team leader for national research team studying professional development in Kentucky (convenes and facilitates statewide professional development policy makers roundtable)

Principal Investigator for Annie E. Casey professional development research grant: "Building a System for Teacher Learning"

Principal Investigator for Annie E. Casey best practices research grant: "Kentucky Best Practices Project" and Partnership Cadre for School and Community Improvement

Principal Investigator for Pew Charitable Trusts professional development research grant: "Building a System of Teacher Learning for Standards-Based Reform"

Team leader for long-term Partnership program design and strategic planning work group

Team leader for research and development of Partnership community involvement toolkits:

*Turn Up the Volume: The Students Speak Toolkit*  
*Business Connections for Excellence in Education*  
*Ready for Work: Essential Skills for Kentucky Jobs*  
*Safe and Welcoming Schools*  
*Creating World Class Communities*  
*Professional Development Resource Guide*  
*Difficult Ground: School Board Involvement*

- Member of Strategic Planning Committee for KY School Boards Association
- Initiated programs to bring businesses and schools together to enhance student achievement
- Initiated publications to encourage citizen involvement in education
- Designed listening skills communication program for elementary teachers, counselors, and administrators, Fayette County Public Schools
- Developed demonstration modular learning centers in all areas of language arts
- Development inservice materials: "Reluctant Readers", "Reading in Content Areas", "Implementing Effective Procedures with Basal Reading Programs", "Working with Nonreading Adults", "Spelling is Fun and Growth Producing"

Developed presentations:

"Educating Children Today: A Comparison"  
"Classroom Environment and Teaching Effectiveness"- Based on two years teaching and research in Fayette County Public School, 1982-1984)  
"Leadership and Communication Skills"  
"Helping Schools Become Customer-Friendly"  
"Criteria for Effective Business Involvement in Education"  
"Role of Information in Changing public Perceptions"

Developed and presented staff development:

Strategic Planning  
Conflict Resolution  
Business Involvement in Education  
Team Building  
Effective Meetings

# CAROLYN WITT JONES

School-Based Decision Making  
Leadership in Schools and Community

Developed a research report for the Study Committee on Chemical Abuse in Communities and Schools

## B. Presentations and Keynote Addresses

American Education Research Association  
Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership  
Pew Charitable Trusts staff  
Partnership Cadre for School and Community Improvement, Class of 2001 and Class of 2002  
Partnership Invitational Professional Development Conference  
Legislative Education Subcommittee  
Kentucky State board of Education  
Campaign for Fiscal Equity  
New Mexico First, Taos, NM  
National Business Roundtable, Washington, D.C.  
National Business/Higher Education Forum, Long Beach, CA  
National Alliance of Business, Washington, DC  
National Conference Board, New York, NY  
American Educator Researchers Association, San Diego, CA  
Wake Education Partnership, Raleigh, NC  
Arkansas Business and Education Alliance, Little Rock, AR  
Kentucky association of Community Volunteers  
Governor's Scholars Program  
Congress of Parents and Teachers  
Kentucky School Councils Association  
Kentucky Schools Boards Association  
American Association of Superintendents and Administrators  
Kentucky Chamber of Commerce  
Local rotary, Kiwanis, Chambers of Commerce

## C. Professional Memberships

National Staff Development Council  
National School Boards Association  
Lexington Chamber of Commerce  
Kentucky Chamber of Commerce  
Kentucky Education Coalition  
Phi Delta Kappa  
National Alliance of Business  
Education Coalition of the States  
Kentucky Association of School Councils  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
Alpha Delta Kappa (Women's Educational Honorary)

## D. Related Activities and Service

School of Education Advisory Committee, Spalding College  
National Alliance of Business Advisory Committee  
American Diploma Project Partner  
Kentucky Gear-Up Grant Partner  
Kentucky Institute for Education Reform Board Member  
Fayette County Early Childhood Work Group  
Appalachian Education Laboratory Board member

# CAROLYN WITT JONES

Kentucky School Boards Teaching Quality Task Force Member  
Served as Design Team Member for Kentucky's Distinguished Educators Program, Kentucky's Teacher Leadership Academy  
Consultant-Education, Planning, Management  
Southern Regional Education Board for Teacher Education  
Co-Chair, Fayette County Task Force on Curriculum  
Community Member, Fayette County Public Schools Committee on Chemical Abuse  
Southern Association of Public Schools Evaluation Teams  
Co-Chair, Fayette County Task Force on Curriculum  
Community member, Fayette County Public Schools Committee on Chemical Abuse  
Southern association of public Schools Evaluation Teams  
Workshop Convener for Education Issues  
Reading tutor for adults and children  
Diagnostic evaluator of students with reading problems  
Community Member, Middle School Planning Committee  
NICS Institute for Middle School Planning  
ASCD Institute for Strategic Planning  
Effective School Administration: Management Development Program  
Member, Fayette County Task Force on Drug and Alcohol Abuse  
Trainer, Kentucky Association for School Executives

## Community Involvement

### Guest Lectures – Community Groups

"Communication: Unleashing of Potential", Leadership Kentucky  
"Role of Business in Education", University of Kentucky  
"Have Courage in the Face of Obstacles", International Reading Association  
"Organizational Systems/Managing Choices", Lexington Junior League  
"Reading Readiness: Why and How", Kentucky Association of Children Under Six  
"Self Image and Its Relationship to Achievement"  
"Role of the College Supervisor"

### Graduate Classes

"Modifications of Houghton-Mifflin Reading Program"  
"Listening: Key to Reading Success"  
"Resolving Conflict: Key to Potential"  
"KERA in the Fayette County Public Schools"  
Consultant/Workshops Conducted

### Guest Lectures - Church Groups:

"Christian Child Development"  
"Parenting Skills and Strategies"  
"Planning Strategies for Effective Use of Resources"  
"Group Dynamics"

### Memberships – Community (Current and past involvement)

Fayette County Human Rights Commission  
Good Shepherd Episcopal Day School Board  
Good Shepherd Episcopal Church  
Vestry Member,  
Sunday School Leader  
Chair, Christian Education for Church

# CAROLYN WITT JONES

Care Fiver: Stephen ministry  
Governor's Task Force on Language Arts  
Lexington Women's Club  
International Affairs Department  
Clothing Center Participant  
Advisory Committee  
Art Design Committees  
Lexington City Panhellenic  
Past President  
Past Vice President  
Past Advisor  
Lexington Junior League  
Past Chair, Chemical Abuse Study Group  
Provisional Co-Chair  
Other committee chairs: Entries, Office, Grounds, Placement  
Chrysalis House Board  
Center for Women, Children and Families Board  
Volunteer Leader, Community Hospice  
Bluegrass Sigma Kappa Alumnus  
Hospitality House Volunteer  
Certified Leader, Stephen Glenn's "Developing Capable Young People"  
Community Volunteer  
Cancer Fund  
Heart Fund  
March of Dimes  
Christmas in the Park Committee  
Trainer, Rape Crisis Center Counselor  
Bishop Hosea Continuing Education Fund Committee  
Horizon Center Board  
United Way Planning and Research Board, Chair, Homeless Development Group  
Trainer for Volunteer center  
Board Member, GO Women, non-profit organization helping low-income women in central and eastern Kentucky gain job skills and self confidence through workshops and mentoring.  
South Lexington YMCA Board Member

## Special Recognitions

### Partnership for Kentucky Schools

Business Leadership in Developing Partnerships Statewide from the National Association of Partners in Education

Leaders for Change Decade Award from the Council for Aid to Education

Selected as the 1998 State Business/Education Coalition of the Year by the National Alliance of Business

Learning and Liberty award from the Kentucky Public Relations Association.

# CAROLYN WITT JONES

William T. Nallia Educational Leadership Award from the Kentucky Association of School Administrators

Best of Class Award from the National Conference Board for "efforts in helping business improve education in Kentucky"

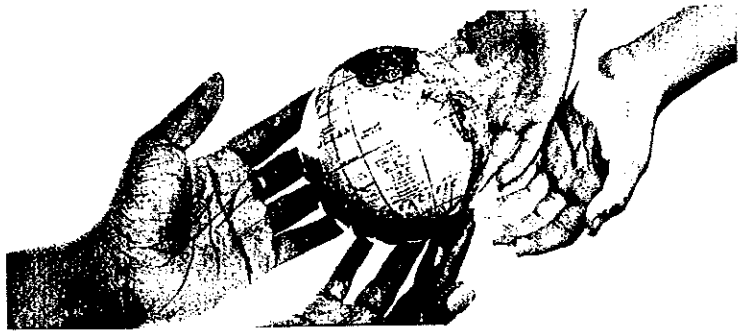
ADDY Award from Lexington Advertisers Association 2001 and 2002

## Personal

Honorary Doctorate: Georgetown College  
National Leadership in Business Award, McKee Foods Corporation  
Outstanding Teacher Award SNEA  
Outstanding Young Women of America  
Alpha Delta Kappa Honorary  
Phi Delta Kappa Service to Education Award  
Kentucky Educational Leadership Institute  
Southern Association of Evaluation Teams  
Kentucky Educational Leadership Institute  
Southern Association of Evaluation Teams  
Kentucky Institute for Women in School Administration  
Commonwealth Institute for Administrators  
Outstanding Alumnus: Georgetown College

## Personal Data

Home Address	358 Cochran Road Lexington, KY 40502 <a href="mailto:cwjones@pfks.org">cwjones@pfks.org</a>
Date of Birth	May 30, 1941
Two Children	Paige Snyder Somerville Sara Blake Eames
One Grandchild	Mac Somerville
Husband	Guy Vernon Jones



THE FOR  
SCHOOL/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A partnership between a business/community organization and a school that meets the gold standard:

Focuses on improving student achievement and produces measurable results.

Bases its work on the analysis and synthesis of data (surveys, diagnostic evaluations, and state, district, or school testing outcomes).

Is evaluated regularly and should be sustainable over time.

Has as a priority the one-to-one support of and advocacy for students.

Offers as part of its work the training and ongoing support of volunteers.

Undertakes activities that are integral to district and school improvement plans and to the content and curriculum offered by classroom teachers.

Is widely recognized in the district and community, serving as a model for partnerships in other schools and communities.

Has a clear and widely understood agreement of what the school needs and what the community can provide.

Matches the priorities of the community partner with those of the school.

Is led by a joint leadership team that determines policies and practices, which unify the partnership. Such practices could include: establishing a database of partnerships; creating a volunteer center to serve as an informational clearing-house and training site; developing and maintaining communication vehicles linking partnership members; assisting in the evaluation and reporting of partnership results.



Partnership for  
Successful Schools





### Partnership for Successful Schools

**FACTS** For more than a decade, the Partnership for Kentucky Schools has been gaining front-line knowledge and experience in building effective relationships among employers, schools, and communities to create a stronger, smarter workforce.

Now, the Partnership for Successful Schools will take that work to the next level—and nationwide—in a new venture that will deliver practical, real-world programs and strategies that help focus community and employer energy on school improvement efforts.

The need for better schools is greater than ever—and the challenges of improving education grow more acute every day. Whether it's the physical and cultural conditions that affect teaching and learning, a lack of understanding about the relationship between education and global competition, or citizen apathy and confusion, the difficulties facing schools are complex and multi-faceted. They require focused, strategic solutions.

An independent, nonpartisan organization, the Partnership for Successful Schools recognizes the critical connections among economic development, education, government, and the workforce. It is uniquely positioned to help communities, schools, and employers make the most of these vital partnerships. Here's how:

- Working directly with a local school or district, the Partnership focuses research-based programs on specific improvement projects, charting progress and challenges to ensure accountability.
- Communications and outreach strategies are created to connect schools with their communities, with a particular emphasis on local employers.
- Information is developed on the community's education needs and expectations and on the school's need for community support and expertise.

*continued*

THE PARTNERSHIP is a national model for engaging communities and businesses as effective advocates for better schools. It has a single-minded focus, well-executed strategies, and an impressive track record that have served Kentucky students well.

Bill Porter, Executive Director  
Grants/Markers for Education, Portland, Oregon

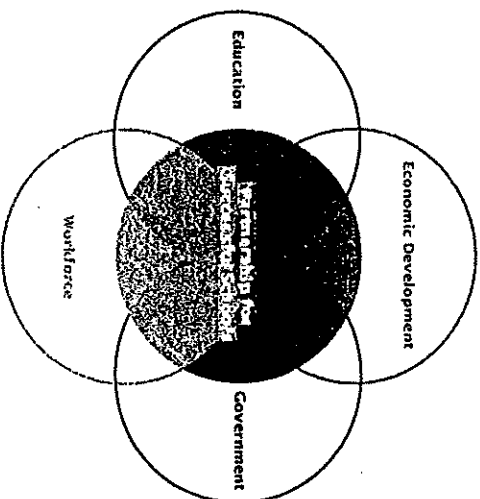
A sustained and powerful voice for excellence in education, a catalyst for positive change, a support critic, a partner with and support to schools and communities, a patron of high-quality research and evaluation—the Partnership has been an instrumental agent in the transformation of educational opportunities for Kentucky's children.

Gene Wilhoit, Commissioner  
Kentucky Department of Education

- Lessons learned from the school's experiences provide the basis of recommendations to local and state policymakers for ways to improve education.

The Partnership for Successful Schools engages all members of a community—school, civic, and faith leaders, parents, students, employers, and involved citizens—in work to build the local capacity needed to achieve and sustain educational excellence.

Its goal: strengthening the bottom line for each community it serves by building effective partnerships to improve schools, accelerate student achievement, and address the need for a more highly skilled workforce.





# SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: SUCCESS AND CHALLENGES

## The Need for a Model

For more than a decade, the Partnership at NewCities has worked to involve influential employers and community members in improving schools, reflecting the belief that the education of all students is everyone's business. Says Partnership Executive Director Carolyn Witt Jones: "We have to show employers and the community that they have to put an oar in the water and help us paddle this boat."

But it isn't easy to create successful collaborations between schools and business/community organizations. That became clear during the Partnership's work with eight schools to help them involve employers in efforts to improve student achievement. Although successful in many projects, that initiative highlighted the barriers to creating meaningful and productive partnerships between schools and their communities.

These barriers are rooted in a history of educational isolationism. School systems, once controlled more directly by local communities, have become insulated from parent and community influence over the last century.<sup>1</sup> As schools assumed the role of educating students to serve society and the economy, P-12 education became the domain of professionals. Schools began to operate in their own spheres, essentially creating environments for students that were separate from home and community.

In the last 20 years, however, there has been increasing awareness that schools need help to provide the skills and knowledge students need to succeed today. Recent attempts to broaden participation in P-12 education have begun to chip away at the barriers separating schools and their communities. For instance, the P-16 movement engages P-12 educators, postsecondary representatives, employers and community partners in efforts to help smooth the transition from high school to adult life.<sup>2</sup> Adopt-a-school models pair schools with business partners, who contribute resources and volunteer time. A high school reform model known as "schools within a school" groups students into career clusters, which often are connected with business partners.

These efforts are a step in the right direction, but they tend to be temporary, project-like in nature and difficult to sustain. A national survey found that schools value business and community partnerships, but most have not established systemic procedures to recruit partners and monitor the relationships.<sup>3</sup> Often when such partnerships are established, the goals, details on how the partners will interact and plans for measuring results are not spelled out. Many efforts have not been systematic enough or in place long enough to produce long-term results. At present, then, there are scant examples of partnerships that fundamentally alter the relationships among P-12, postsecondary and community and business organizations in ways that better prepare students for adult life.

The absence of a model for school-community engagement focused on student achievement prompted the Partnership at NewCities to commission a study of two Kentucky communities and one school district that are working to create meaningful collaborations: Owensboro, Northern Kentucky and the Kenton County school district. Research findings are shared in the accompanying case studies. This overview looks at the lessons these partnerships offer and provides guidance to other communities seeking to engage their communities in the work of school improvement.

## Achieving Effective School-Community Engagement

### A Culture Change

Fundamentally altering the relationship between P-12 schools and their surrounding communities is not a simple, step-by-step process. Indeed, the entire culture of the schools and community will need to change. Just as schools that have successfully improved student achievement created cultures in which teachers accept responsibility for making sure all students achieve,<sup>4</sup> a culture must be created in which an entire community accepts responsibility for, and takes action to produce, well-educated citizens:



*Just as schools need to feel responsible for all the children, communities need to feel responsible for all the schools because the local community's workforce comes from all of the schools. Unless the community is willing to own all students and make sure they develop skills that will enhance the local economy, they risk losing top students to other communities and being left with students who are inadequately prepared to participate in the local workforce.<sup>5</sup>*

But how do you get an entire community to "own all students"? Schools have found that the first step in accepting responsibility for educating all students was to behave as if all students were capable of high achievement. When they did this, educators were surprised by what their students were able to do.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, we would suggest that the first step to changing a school-community culture is to behave as if an entire community can make a difference with student learning. The accompanying Guide suggests some initial steps that communities can take to behave as if they can make a difference. If communities persevere, we believe they will bring about the culture change that is needed for school improvement.

## **Basis for the Guide**

The Guide for this work, included in this packet, combines lessons learned from the communities that were studied with the Partnership's Gold Standard for School-Community Partnerships. The Gold Standard was developed following the Partnership's eight-school initiative and focused on the characteristics of an effective partnership between a single school and a business/community organization. This report moves further to encourage partnerships that encompass an entire community, including P-12 school districts, postsecondary institutions, government and community agencies and employers.

## **Key Questions**

To help interpret the cases, we pose here a set of questions to ensure that school-community engagement is understood and promoted as a process that requires a sustained commitment. These questions also provide the foundation for the enclosed Guide.

- |                                  |                                       |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ■ How do we begin?               | ■ What is required of participants?   |
| ■ Who will lead?                 | ■ How long will it take?              |
| ■ Who should be involved?        | ■ How will we stay on target?         |
| ■ What is the focus of the work? | ■ How will we know we have succeeded? |

## **How do we begin?**

*Find the right person(s) to lead the work:* Anthropologist Margaret Mead is credited with saying, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The cases reveal that the work around school-community engagement is often spearheaded by just such a group of dedicated citizens. It helped that these individuals had some clout within the community.

In Owensboro, two leaders of the Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation—each of whom enjoyed a local, regional and statewide reputation—made it their business to revive the work of the Greater Owensboro Alliance for Education.

In Northern Kentucky, several staff and members of the Chamber of Commerce have long served as catalysts for community engagement in schools. In recent years, they have been joined by committed individuals from Northern Kentucky University, the Partnership at NewCities, Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America, Inc., the Northern Kentucky Council of Partners (the local P-16 council) and several area businesses and school districts. (P-16 councils bring together educators from all levels as well as employers and labor and community leaders to address area education needs.)

The Kenton County school district has experienced remarkable stability of district leaders who have worked for many years to develop a new high school model to better prepare students for postsecondary education and careers.

## Who will lead?

**Identify or create an umbrella group:** Key individuals can revive interest in school-community engagement, but they need the support of organizations that are willing to assume organizational responsibility. In Owensboro, the local economic development corporation has played a key role, designating staff to lead the work. In addition, a small amount of funding support has been obtained from the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) through its local P-16 council structure.

In Northern Kentucky, several entities have been particularly influential in activating the community around school improvement. The Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce has initiated several business-school partnerships over the last decade. The Partnership at New Cities has worked closely with the Kenton County school district, and more recently joined regional efforts to develop community-wide involvement in improving area schools. Northern Kentucky University has been a leader in involving postsecondary institutions in the work. The Council of Partners has also been active. These entities, along with several others, have united their efforts around Vision 2015, ([www.vision2015.org](http://www.vision2015.org)), a region-wide initiative to improve the area's educational and economic opportunities.

**Paid staff person with requisite skills:** It is important to have someone who is responsible for keeping the effort organized and on track. This person must have the ability to engage multiple partners around the work as well as excellent communication and facilitation skills. The staff person should have experience outside the region to provide perspective on how the work fits with state and national trends and initiatives. It also helps if this leader understands education but has experience outside that field to better understand and communicate with business and community leaders.

In Owensboro, Alliance members noted that the Alliance lost direction when the group did not have paid staff. One member remarked, "The group must have an executive director who understands the education bureaucracy. You must be willing to pay someone a reasonable wage."

In Northern Kentucky, staff members at several organizations were allowed to allocate portions of their paid staff time to advance the work of community engagement with school improvement. Recently, Vision 2015 hired

staff members with a broad community perspective to lead the work.

Kenton County Public Schools hired a business liaison with a marketing background to secure business and community resources to support school district initiatives.

## Who should be involved?

**Key organizations:** It is important to include organizations whose participation is critical to the success of the school-community partnership. Both the Owensboro and Northern Kentucky metropolitan areas encompass several school districts and postsecondary institutions, all of which have been invited to participate. In addition, the initiatives in these communities included representatives of leading employers in the area, such as the Owensboro Medical Health System and BellSouth in Owensboro, and Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America, Inc. and Citigroup in Northern Kentucky.

In developing its Schools of Study program ([www.kenton.k12.ky.us/sos/default.htm](http://www.kenton.k12.ky.us/sos/default.htm)), the Kenton County district has worked with a variety of employers whose field of expertise matches the four Schools of Study. Local media outlets have also been important participants in both areas, where representatives of local newspapers serve as active and contributing members of the organizations and also ensure media coverage of the work. Other key entities that should be represented include local government, health and welfare agencies and education advocacy groups.

"Economic development involvement is what kept it going here. ... It is critical to the shared vision in an area where you have a diversity of interests and constituencies, with all the different districts and communities ... that the unity of vision is provided by economic development."

Nick Brake, President  
Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation

**Top leaders of partner organizations:** In Owensboro and Northern Kentucky, top leaders of the partner organizations are involved in the work—CEOs, superintendents of school districts (which are often leading employers in the community), college presidents and deans, mayors



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and judge-executives and chairs of nonprofit organizations. Their participation sends the message that the work is important, and these leaders are able to leverage the resources of their organizations to support the work. An Owensboro Alliance member commented:

*We went through a period where we had a lot of guidance counselors there... and superintendents would come in less frequently. There were good discussions, but from a policy perspective. ... We [now] have working groups with superintendents, [and] their staff is then engaged on the actual deliverables.*

**The community:** The effort is more likely to succeed if an entire community is engaged with the work. This can occur only if the effort maintains visibility, which can result from connections to media outlets or Internet-based communication networks. In Owensboro, the editor of the local newspaper is an active member of the Alliance. In Northern Kentucky, the Vision 2015 team ensured that the community-wide “Champions for Education” summit was widely publicized. The Kenton County school district’s public information officer, with support from the Partnership at NewCities, has issued regular press releases about the district’s outreach activities.

## What is the focus of the work?

**Improving student preparation:** In the three cases profiled, school-community partnerships focus on improving student preparation. Making student success the goal secured the commitment of partner organizations because of the impact that success has on the entire community. In Owensboro, all Alliance activities focus on ensuring a better transition by students from high school to postsecondary education and/or the workplace. Northern Kentucky’s Vision 2015 initiative is broader, but its first three education goals focus on improved education opportunities for students. The Kenton County school district’s marketing plan for the Schools of Study program is based on the rationale that local employers have a stake in ensuring that students enter the job market well-prepared.

**Use local statistics to identify a specific focus:** Both communities developed a collaborative spirit by reviewing local statistics to identify problems that everyone wanted to address. Owensboro focused its efforts around data showing that the area’s college-completion rate trailed the state average. A government official serving on the Alliance remarked: “This gives Owensboro a disadvantage in terms of

economic activity and higher-paying jobs.” In addition, the region’s largest employer—the Owensboro Medical Health System—is growing and anticipates needing 500 new nurses in the next five years. These statistics united the partners behind Alliance activities. Said one Alliance member, “If people don’t keep it focused and keep the priorities straight, it could become a mish-mash.”

In Northern Kentucky, the Vision 2015 team examined and shared with the public data showing that the region’s economy and population have been expanding rapidly. Vision 2015 anticipates the creation of 50,000 new jobs by 2015, and the vision team wants to rally the community around an effort to ensure that there are enough skilled local workers to meet that need. A vision team leader noted at the Champions for Education Summit:

*This is all about positioning our region to compete. ... We are in a battle for our future, and educational excellence stands at the heart of what we want to achieve here. We have a goal of 50,000 new jobs, and many require a higher education degree. We have to succeed in preschool, K-12, college and adult education to produce the desired workforce for jobs to materialize, or they will move elsewhere.*

## What is required of participants?

**Work within the structure of the group:** In both communities, structures were created that enabled participants to contribute regularly and in substantive ways. In Owensboro, committees of partner representatives lead each of the Alliance’s five activities and report on progress at the Alliance’s quarterly meetings. In Northern Kentucky, a Vision 2015 educational excellence committee worked for more than a year to create a road map for achieving educational excellence in the region. That group has now evolved into the Vision 2015 implementation team for education. The Kenton County school district has requested the participation of business and community leaders in specific activities, such as meeting with teachers from each School of Study to discuss skills students need, hosting teacher externships and participating in a focus group to provide feedback on the district’s marketing plan.

**Share leadership with members of other partner organizations:** To ensure shared ownership and stability, both organizations created structures to share leadership among the partner organizations. In Owensboro, each committee is co-chaired by different organizational representatives.



Northern Kentucky's Intergenerational Leadership approach pairs a more experienced professional with a young professional to co-chair key committees, helping ensure the sustainability of the work.

**Help secure resources:** Resource support for school-community partnerships is important to ensure success. In Northern Kentucky, a loss of funding resulted in some of the Chamber's earlier initiatives becoming dormant. Under Vision 2015, funding and resources have been provided by partner organizations to launch the effort and keep it going. In Owensboro, partner groups draw on their own resources to supplement a P-16 council grant. The Kenton County school district's marketing plan suggests ways in which both the district and the business community can apply resources toward the goal of ensuring that students are prepared for the job market.

### How long will it take?

**Plan for many years of sustained effort:** Schools and business/community organizations are accustomed to operating largely in isolation from one another, perhaps occasionally engaging in one-time, project-like activities. Working jointly on activities that are at the core of student learning will require cultural and structural changes. Creating this kind of partnership takes time and perseverance—which can make the work a tough sell for business partners who are accustomed to faster results. An Owensboro Alliance leader remarked on the challenge of keeping government and business leaders engaged:

*In the education arena, everything takes longer than business and government people think it should. Our group is divided between process and product people. How do you keep these in balance? How do you enable each group to feel that their needs are being met?*

**Develop short- and long-term timelines:** Even though participants should settle in for a sustained effort, the group should develop short- and long-term timelines to ensure the work moves forward.

### How will we stay on target?

**Distribute short, regular reports:** Launching the effort is much easier than sustaining the work. Generally, enthusiasm is high at the beginning, but sustaining energy and focus over the long term is more of a challenge. The cases profiled here are, in some ways, in their infancy and still must meet

the challenge of maintaining momentum and focus. All three of the projects have used the media to keep all stakeholders informed. Continuing to distribute regular, concise reports will ensure that these stakeholders remain up to date on the progress and challenges of the work. Such reports also will help maintain visibility and keep the effort on target.

### How will we know we succeeded?

**Develop an evaluation plan and monitor progress:** It is unlikely that partner organizations will be willing to continue their efforts without measurable results, so it is important to develop and implement an evaluation plan from the beginning. Activities with clear deliverables can make results more visible. For instance, the Owensboro Alliance has facilitated the creation of a high school health science program, which began in Fall 2007. Similarly, an Alliance committee is developing a high school math curriculum that an area high school will pilot.

The Vision 2015 initiative has also identified some early deliverables, including implementing the Partnership at NewCities' "One-to-One" program to train community members as reading tutors for area elementary schools. The creation of these programs represents success. The next step will be to determine how to evaluate the success of the programs. The Partnership at NewCities' Gold Standard for School/Community Partnerships could be used as an evaluation tool for community engagement efforts.

#### The Cases

This overview has shared the promise and challenges experienced by two communities and one school district attempting to engage an entire community in school improvement. Building on lessons learned from this research and prior Partnership work, we developed the enclosed Guide to Creating School-Community Partnerships That Make a Difference to help other communities interested in launching similar efforts. The specific cases provide more details on what this kind of work looks like on the ground, and the Gold Standard for School/Community Partnerships (available online by clicking on Partnership at NewCities at [www.newcities.org](http://www.newcities.org)) provides an image of what a successful partnership might look like. In reviewing the cases, readers should consider the extent to which each one effectively addresses the key questions posed earlier in this report, how they compare to the Gold Standard and where the challenges remain. Readers also should consider how they might replicate or adapt these efforts in their own communities.

Successful schools require the involvement and support of the communities that surround them—citizens, businesses, elected officials, civic organizations and others who are not traditionally identified as education stakeholders.

Charting this new territory requires hard work that is difficult, both to get under way and to continue over time. But meeting these challenges day after day, year after year, is imperative if our schools are to become key contributors to their communities' economic and civic growth.

The Partnership at NewCities, building on its research and initiatives of the past 15 years, has developed the following structure to help schools and communities create sustainable connections that result in better schools, better-educated citizens and an improved quality of life.

## How do we begin?

*Find the right person(s) to lead the work.* The leader(s) should be well-known and respected in the community to increase the possibility that top leaders of the various groups will participate.

## Who will lead?

*Identify or create an umbrella group to sponsor the work.* In some cases, this group could have an education orientation, such as a local P-16 council. In other areas, employer groups could be primary sponsors. Smaller communities should consider working through a regional structure.

*Hire a staff person with the skills to do this work.* A staff person dedicated to the work will need excellent communication and facilitation skills, should be effective at engaging multiple partners and should have experience outside of education.

## Who should be involved?

*Identify key organizations in the community whose participation is critical to success,* including all school districts and post-secondary institutions, local government, health and welfare agencies, education advocacy groups, local media outlets and CEOs of leading businesses and corporations in the area.

*Recruit the top leaders of each partner organization to participate.* Participation by top leaders (rather than their designees) lends credibility and viability to the work.

*Ensure visibility in the community.* The effort is more likely to succeed if the entire community is engaged with the work, which can only occur if the effort maintains visibility. This can be accomplished through the local media and other avenues, such as informational outreach to civic groups, churches and other organizations.

## What is the focus of the work?

*Focus on improving student preparation.* This focus is most likely to guarantee the commitment of all partner organizations because improved student success has an impact on the entire community.

*Examine local data to determine the specific focus.* Present the group with local education and economic statistics to help identify problem areas and develop a common sense of purpose.

## What is required of participants?

*Work within a structure created by the group* to enable participants to contribute regularly and in substantive ways.

*Share leadership with other partners* to build ownership and offset potential problems when turnover occurs. Members of the participating groups should be directly involved in implementing initiatives.

*Help secure resources.* Each partner organization may contribute resources, but partners may also work together to secure additional resources beyond what the groups can provide.

## How long will it take?

*Plan for many years of sustained effort.* Changing the culture and structure of schools and community organizations and businesses to support the partnership and its objectives will take a sustained effort of at least five years.

*Develop short- and long-term timelines.* Even though the effort will take time, the group should develop short- and long-term timelines to ensure the work moves forward and realizes incremental success.

## How will we stay on target?

*Distribute short, regular reports.* Involve the media and other information outlets in keeping all interested parties updated on progress and challenges to maintain visibility and increase awareness that the work is ongoing and dynamic.

## How will we know we succeeded?

*Develop an evaluation plan and monitor progress regularly.* The group should determine specific ways in which it will regularly measure the results of its work. The Partnership's Gold Standard for School/Community Partnerships may be used to evaluate success.





## Challenges

The cases included in this report provide models for other communities that wish to engage all stakeholders in ensuring that students graduate from high school well-prepared. However, as noted earlier, the work is still relatively new in both locations, and many challenges remain. This work offers guidance on launching a community engagement effort, but communities themselves will need to be prepared to address the challenges that will inevitably arise. We list some of these challenges below.

- **Persevering and maintaining momentum:** Both Owensboro and Northern Kentucky have been working on school-community partnerships for at least two decades. These efforts have ebbed and flowed, depending on the dedication of those involved and the availability of resources. The challenge is to sustain forward momentum. All participants must realize that creating these sorts of partnerships, developing activities and then seeing those activities through takes years of sustained activity.
- **Funding the work.** The cases provide examples of prior efforts that were not sustained due to a lack of funding. It is likely that finding a secure funding source will continue as a challenge when multiple organizations attempt to create partnerships such as these. It is important to identify and secure that funding instead of taking for granted that the work will continue on the basis of whatever time and resources each partner is willing to commit.
- **Lack of resources in rural communities:** A national survey reported that rural schools had below-average levels of community-based partnerships.<sup>7</sup> This is likely due to having fewer businesses, resources and employment opportunities to give shape to the work. In these cases, a regional effort may be more appropriate.
- **Promoting out-of-the-box thinking:** Creating school-community partnerships focused on improved student learning and preparation will require out-of-the-box thinking. The efforts described in the cases tend to be dominated by educators, with a much smaller business and community presence. It may be necessary to widen business and community participation to nudge educators out of their comfort zones and into more substantive and productive partnerships with the community.

## Prospects for the Future

The work of engaging an entire community in school improvement is challenging and difficult, but the potential benefits to a community are quite high. A first step for communities is to develop a clear strategy that addresses the key components as outlined in this overview and the accompanying Guide and to anticipate and address the challenges identified here. A business leader in Northern Kentucky spoke of the importance of making education improvement a community-wide effort:

*If the whole community doesn't get behind Vision 2015... it will not be successful. [The idea is that] everyone sees the direct connection to why education is so important and why they need to support it. We are way far away from that happening, but that is where we are going.*

### More Information

To learn more about this work, contact:

- Patricia J. Kannapel, [pkannapel@bellsouth.net](mailto:pkannapel@bellsouth.net)
- Stephen K. Clements, [skclements@windstream.net](mailto:skclements@windstream.net)

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## The Community

South of the Ohio River across from Cincinnati is the Northern Kentucky area, dominated by the counties of Boone, Campbell and Kenton. Their combined population of about 350,000 makes this the third-largest metropolitan area in the state behind Louisville and Lexington. Approximately half of area jobs are in wholesale and retail trade and the service industries, but a substantial number of employees work in such other sectors as manufacturing, transportation and government. The 2004 median income in Kenton County exceeded both the national average and those of the Louisville and Lexington metropolitan areas, but income levels in Boone and Campbell were somewhat lower.

Although anchored by the large counties, Northern Kentucky spans a broader array of urban, suburban and rural communities. Boone, Campbell and Kenton counties each operate large school systems, but they are also home to eleven school districts located in the towns within them. These districts often have no more than one or two schools. Gallatin, Grant and Pendleton counties are the smaller and more rural counties that are part of the Northern Kentucky school service region, as are the Catholic Diocese schools. As a result, education initiatives in Northern Kentucky potentially affect more than 18 school districts.

## Two Decades of Education Support

A tradition of community support for schools in Northern Kentucky stretches back at least two decades, driven by the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce. Dating from 1989, the Chamber's BEST program (Business-Education Success Teams) matches an area business or organization with a school. Currently there are more than 100 partnerships among area schools and businesses. Some businesses send employees into schools for tutoring or to provide programs such as Junior Achievement or mentoring; others sponsor field trips or provide financial support. The range of BEST programs is substantial, ranging from businesses that make serious financial and volunteer contributions to those that have few activities or interactions. The program is guided by a Chamber-developed needs-analysis process along with the principles of the Partnership at NewCities' Gold Standard for School-Community Partnerships.

The Chamber administers BEST and other education programs under the auspices of its Education Alliance, a nonprofit entity founded in the early 1990s to raise funds for such initiatives. Several key individuals have led the effort to focus the Chamber on education, including Judy Gibbons, a small business owner

with a strong commitment to education and a current member of the Kentucky Board of Education. While supporting education is now part of the Chamber's culture, Gibbons remarked that this was not always the case:


*[Chamber members initially said], "We are not in the business of education, and we don't want to be involved [in these initiatives]." [But] we said over and over, "Your workforce comes out of the education world, and whether you want to be part of it, you are part of the equation."*

Additional noteworthy Chamber programs have emerged over the years, including the Work Ethic Diploma/Career Passport program, created in the late 1990s in response to business representatives' concerns that graduates were arriving at the workplace with poor work habits. High school seniors who meet the criteria—including performance standards in attendance, tardiness, discipline, punctuality and group cooperation—receive the Work Ethic Diploma. They are then eligible to receive a Career Passport, a portfolio of documents they can use in seeking a job. In 2007, nearly 1,500 seniors from 28 of 32 participating area high schools successfully completed the program. The program has been adapted for younger students, so that students across the grade spectrum will soon have access to the Work Ethic program.

A teacher leadership program, launched by the Chamber in 2000, was modeled on Leadership Kentucky and operated successfully for several years with a teacher-friendly schedule. That program is currently on hold due to a lack of funds. Another Chamber initiative, the business-educator connection, paid teachers \$500 stipends to spend a week during the summer at a local business to become familiar with the skills and knowledge that high school graduates need. The program operated for two to three years but also was discontinued due to a lack of funds.

In general, the Chamber has embraced an advocacy role for education. In 2006, it formed a 20-member Education Policy and Advocacy Committee of influential employers, educators, organizational leaders and community representatives to conduct analyses and make recommendations on state and federal legislative and regulatory matters. The education programs and positions supported by the Chamber are featured in "Where We Stand," an annual Chamber publication used across the region that is also provided to state and federal legislators.

The Chamber's education efforts have also been strongly supported through the years by the Tri-County Economic Development Corporation (Tri-ED), an organization based in Kenton County that supports commercial growth throughout the area.



Tri-ED has promoted business expansion by providing community data and helping establish connections among entrepreneurs and manufacturers. Its leaders have long recognized the pivotal role education plays in building a region's economy.

## More Recent Education Support Initiatives

### Key Partners

In recent years, new partners have joined the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce in education improvement efforts. The Northern Kentucky Council of Partners, the region's P-16 Council, was established informally in 1993 to bring secondary and postsecondary representatives together to discuss curriculum alignment and the transition to postsecondary education. In 2001, the Council hired a staff and broadened its mission to address transition issues across the P-16 divide. Council activities have included the American Diploma Project (a multi-state effort to develop a more rigorous high school curriculum), efforts to increase the number of adults in postsecondary education, regional programs to increase awareness of skills and postsecondary education needed for 21st century jobs and its annual Education Week programs and celebrations.

The Lexington-based Partnership at NewCities sponsors the Kentucky Scholars program in Kenton County and other area school districts to encourage middle and high school students to take a rigorous course of study to better prepare them for postsecondary education and the workforce. An earlier Partnership initiative that included Simon Kenton High School in Kenton County was designed to link schools with business and community organizations. The Partnership's site coordinator, Polly Lusk Page, a native of Northern Kentucky with extensive connections throughout the community, helped Simon Kenton High School establish business/community linkages.

When that initiative ended, the Kenton County district requested that Page work with all three of the district's high schools to facilitate business-school partnerships. Her work has since expanded beyond the Kenton County district, and she now represents the Partnership in numerous regional educational initiatives. Page's evolving role is a model for how the work of a change facilitator might unfold over time. (The "How To" Guide on the following page provides details.)

Another key player in educational improvement in Northern Kentucky is the Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing of North America facility in Erlanger, through Helen Carroll, its manager of community relations. Northern Kentucky Univer-

sity (NKU) has also been intensely involved under the leadership of President James Votruba, who views P-12 improvement as a vital part of NKU's regional stewardship and has backed that commitment with resources and considerable investment of his time.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the superintendents of several school districts have played active roles, in particular the county school districts of Kenton and Boone and the independent districts of Erlanger-Elsmere and Walton-Verona.

An important factor in the long-term success of the area's education support efforts has been the involvement of participants from outside the immediate education and business communities. For example, state legislators from Northern Kentucky have served for years on boards, committees and task forces. These influential citizens help spotlight the critical importance of education in the region and elsewhere. Similarly, local journalists have been included in the effort, reflecting the belief that media coverage is needed to advance the education agenda.

### Promising Initiatives

*Forward Quest.* Northern Kentucky began experimenting with region-wide strategic planning in 1980, creating a Boone-Campbell-Kenton economic development agency, consolidating sanitation and water districts and lobbying to establish a new congressional district. In 1995, the Chamber launched a planning initiative that included a focus on education and human resources and generated 44 regional goals. The next year, Forward Quest was formed to coordinate the effort to implement those goals. Forward Quest spawned The Urban Learning Center, an inner-city program to help remove barriers that prevent low-income youth and adults from attending college; sponsored numerous studies of education in Northern Kentucky; and helped sponsor the Council of Partners. Other Forward Quest initiatives were Legacy, a young leaders' organization, and Community Solutions, an integrated, multi-service partnership for children and families.

*Vision 2015.* Most recently, the Chamber has joined with other groups to sponsor a follow-up to the Forward Quest strategic planning initiative. Vision 2015 seeks to improve social and economic conditions in the Northern Kentucky area. Approximately 2,000 citizens from the nine-county region worked on committees to shape the Vision 2015 report, issued in March 2006. To promote sustainability, the committees were organized using an intergenerational leadership model that paired an older area professional with a promising young leader from the business or civic community.

The Vision 2015 report anticipated creation of 50,000 new jobs in less than a decade—some 20,000 of which would require a bachelor's degree—and it contained recommendations for improving education to support that level of economic development. The report identified seven strategies to achieve educational excellence and numerous implementation ideas for each one. The strategies:

- Provide high quality, affordable early childhood programs for all children.
- Challenge students with a rigorous curriculum necessary for furthering their education and career goals and for strengthening our region's workforce.
- Develop a nationally recognized "culture of contribution" accomplished through service learning and full community engagement in schools.
- Exceed national standards for educator excellence in school systems that pay competitive salaries, reward performance and require accountability.
- Make postsecondary education and adult training accessible and affordable to all.
- As a region, lead in connecting our children's in-school and out-of-school development.
- Ensure that all Northern Kentucky education institutions have financial resources and program alignment to reach these goals.

To communicate the Vision 2015 education goals, create a sense of urgency about regional challenges and activate citizens to create school-community collaborations, an area-wide community summit—Champions for Education—was held in November 2007. Summit organizers included Vision 2015, the Education Alliance of Northern Kentucky, the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, the Northern Kentucky Council of Partners and the Partnership at NewCities. The planning process leading up to the summit lasted 11 months, involved a planning team of 18 members and was supported financially by 22 businesses and organizations.

The summit attracted more than 700 citizens from the education, business, government, nonprofit and postsecondary sectors. They heard regional leaders, including Chamber President Steve Stevens; Toyota officials Jim Wiseman and Helen Carroll; and Vision 2015 co-chairs A.J. Schaeffer, a local businessman, and NKU President Votruba speak in plenary sessions. Kati Haycock of the Education Trust in Washington, D.C., presented the keynote address. Attendees also participated in concurrent sessions with

#### From Site Coordinator to Partnership Director of Community Engagement: A "How To" Guide

- Regularly attend meetings at the school and district office to determine needs and issues (site council, PTA, faculty, department, school board, etc.).
- Cultivate and sustain relationships of trust with school/district personnel.
- Use effective meetings procedures, facilitate focus on student achievement efforts, develop results-oriented plans/strategies for carrying out work.
- Seek opportunities to improve school culture.
- Engage the community by finding points of interaction among groups.
- Broker relationships and facilitate conversations to learn what skills, knowledge and dispositions are needed for specific careers.
- Take advantage of every opportunity to be a consistent "voice" in community groups.
- Become a respected and skillful key leader in school/community work.
- Offer strategies and process ideas for defining the roles of education, workforce and economic development and government leadership in unified and sustained support of education outcomes.

speakers and panelists sharing national, state and regional perspectives, data and best practices related to the Vision 2015 education recommendations.

The community summit essentially launched the work of implementing the Vision 2015 goals. Based on an analysis of information collected at the summit, the Vision 2015 education implementation team—headed by Toyota's Helen Carroll—has created a 2008 Action Agenda:

- Place "champions"—volunteers enlisted at the summit—in activities related to their interests and aligned with education goals, and recruit additional champions.
- Launch a regional family engagement initiative focused on improving student achievement, and support the Prichard Committee's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership.<sup>2</sup>
- Assist in developing proficient literacy skills for every child in the region by creating a Literacy Team and implementing "One to One: Practicing Reading with Students"<sup>3</sup> in schools throughout the region.

- Support establishment of a Center for Education Excellence—an educator recruitment, retention and professional development entity—by creating a steering committee to work with area school districts and postsecondary institutions.
- Develop a data collection system for the region.

The project-wide Vision 2015 implementation team also will continue to monitor and support numerous other education promotion efforts, including the United Way's Success by Six, the Born Learning Public Awareness Campaign and the Strive initiative, a broad-based effort designed to bring about significant improvement in achievement in the three urban districts of Cincinnati Public Schools in Ohio and in Covington and Newport in Kentucky through the creation of focused collaborative efforts using evidence based practices.

## Challenges

Northern Kentucky has made great strides in rallying support for public schools, but numerous challenges remain:

**Securing and maintaining funding:** The history of business and community engagement in education improvement in the Northern Kentucky area has been characterized by funding cycles in which initiatives were launched and appeared successful, but then disappeared when funding was no longer available. The current Vision 2015 initiative has been supported by pledges from the various partner groups, but there is no secure long-term funding stream. The challenge will be to sustain the momentum without ongoing, dedicated funding support.

**Breaking out of the silos:** Northern Kentucky has had some success engaging business and community organizations in the work of school improvement, but getting school districts and business/community organizations to think beyond one-time, project-like activities to a long-term, substantive partnership will require new ways of thinking and operating.

**Regional vs. state initiatives:** Some of the Vision 2015 goals are dependent on state level action, such as the preschool initiative. If state funding and support cannot be secured, will the region be able to move ahead on these initiatives on its own?

## Reflections

Northern Kentucky is at the forefront of school-community engagement efforts through the long-term commitment of several high-profile organizations and individuals. The success of so many school-community initiatives over the years is evidence of

the potential that exists for more and better partnerships in the future. Vision 2015 is an ambitious undertaking, but it has thus far enjoyed support and received significant resources from various sectors of the community. To realize its objectives, leaders of Vision 2015 will need to address some of the challenges listed above—and to acknowledge that what they are trying to do will require perseverance and new ways of thinking. Currently, enthusiasm appears to be high. We hope Vision 2015 can build on this enthusiasm to translate its goals into realities.

### *Vision 2015 Education Partners*

Citigroup

Northern Kentucky Council of Partners

Education Alliance of Northern Kentucky

Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

Northern Kentucky University

Partnership at NewCities

Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America, Inc.

United Way of Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky

Thomas More College

Gateway Community and Technical College

E.W. Scripps Foundation

Success by Six, Boone County

Kentucky Enquirer/NKY.com

Kenton County Public Library

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

Center for Educator Excellence

<sup>1</sup> This commitment is perhaps best embodied in NKU's business plan, unveiled in late 2007. That report is available at [http://president.nku.edu/resources/NKU\\_BusinessPlan\\_121107.pdf](http://president.nku.edu/resources/NKU_BusinessPlan_121107.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership offers training programs to help parents become leaders in their local schools.

<sup>3</sup> The "One to One" reading tutoring program is an initiative of the Partnership at NewCities in which business or community organizations provide volunteers to tutor children in reading.

## The Community

Owensboro-Daviess County, a small metropolitan area on the banks of the Ohio River in Western Kentucky, is home to about 93,000 people. Owensboro is a cultural and economic hub for the surrounding, largely rural area. The largest employer is the Owensboro Medical Health System (OMHS), serving eight counties in Kentucky and southern Indiana and employing more than 3,000 people. The second largest employers are education systems: the Daviess County Public Schools, Owensboro Public Schools and Owensboro Community and Technical College combined employ more than 4,000 people.

The city is home to the two public school systems mentioned above and is in close proximity to several rural school districts in surrounding counties. The Catholic Diocese of Owensboro operates numerous schools in the metro area and nine surrounding counties. Owensboro has two independent, four-year postsecondary institutions: Brescia University and Kentucky Wesleyan College. In addition, Owensboro Community and Technical College (OCTC) offers two-year degrees. Graduate programs are offered at local sites by Western Kentucky University and Murray State University.

## History of Community Engagement with Education

Community engagement in education in the Greater Owensboro area began some 25 years ago when the Citizens Committee on Education was established to bring a community college to the city. That effort was successful, and the organization has served as an advocacy group since that time. A recent initiative of the Citizens Committee, "The Learning Community," is designed to encourage lifelong learning by urging organizations and businesses to sign a Learning Contract pledging their support through such activities as providing tuition reimbursement to employees and granting employees flex time to volunteer in schools.


The Owensboro Regional Alliance was formed in 1999 as a partnership of regional leaders in education, business and industry in Daviess County and three surrounding counties. Dr. Nick Brake initially represented the Daviess County school system on the Alliance; later, as dean of OCTC, he chaired the group, playing a key role in keeping the Alliance alive over the years. School superintendents and representatives from the community college and industry also have participated in this initiative. The Alliance initially focused on improving the transition from high school to college and technical careers. By 2002, the group began to develop a P-16 focus—in keeping with the funding support it received

from the state Council on Postsecondary Education to serve as the area's P-16 council.

Alliance activity has fluctuated over the years, depending on leadership. Initially, the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) funded a part-time executive director—an administrator from the Owensboro Public Schools. Business and industry became more involved, and various initiatives were undertaken to link schools with businesses. These included a "teachers in the workplace" program designed to bring teachers into area businesses to learn about workplace skills; and Discover College, which seeks to improve the community's college-going rate by enrolling high school students in college classes.

A leadership change led to a relatively dormant period for the Alliance, but the organization has undergone a recent revival with Brake assuming the position of president of the Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation, a public-private partnership that serves as the economic development agency for the area. Brake believes that involving the local economic development agency is critical to creating a shared vision. The Owensboro area encompasses a diverse system of school districts and communities, and there are a number of issues related to postsecondary education. (The only four-year institutions are private colleges and some community members support locating a four-year public institution there.) Given this diversity, a shared desire for economic development can unite the community.

Using the leverage provided by his role at the Economic Development Corporation, Brake hired Helen Mountjoy as Executive Vice-President in 2006 and designated part of her work to serve as a staff member for the Alliance. Mountjoy had just finished a lengthy term on the Kentucky Board of Education. She was well-known and well-respected in business and education circles across the state and in the Owensboro community. The Alliance again received a grant from the CPE to serve as a P-16 Council, and is now known as the Greater Owensboro Alliance for Education. After this research concluded, Mountjoy was named Secretary of the Kentucky Education Cabinet by Governor Steve Beshear. Tracy Marksberry, executive director of the Learning Community, subsequently assumed the role of Alliance staff person with the Economic Development Corporation continuing as the lead agency. It is hoped that this partnering of two agencies that are heavily invested in the work will ensure the Alliance's long-term viability.



## The Greater Owensboro Alliance for Education

A total of 36 members serve on the Alliance, representing all area school districts, all area postsecondary education institutions, workforce development and adult education programs, business and industry, labor unions, government and community organizations. Attendance at the Alliance's quarterly meetings averages 28. Representatives of each of the member organizations come from the highest levels of the organization: school superintendents, college presidents and deans, chairs/directors of community organizations, CEOs of businesses and the county judge-executive and mayor. When this research was conducted in spring 2007, Daviess County Judge-Executive Reid Haire and Marilyn Brookman, dean of Owensboro's Western Kentucky University program, served as Alliance co-chairs. Other active participants in the organization include representatives from the Owensboro Medical Health System (OMHS), the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer* and BellSouth.

### Structure and Focus

The focus of the Alliance's work is to ensure a seamless transition from high school to college and/or the workplace, and from postsecondary education to the workplace. The Alliance developed five major initiatives and formed a committee to lead the work of each:

- **Teachers in Technology program, headed by an Economic Development Corporation staff person**
- **High school/postsecondary math project, led by the OCTC dean and the Daviess County High School principal**
- **Curriculum Roundtable discussions between K-12 and postsecondary representatives, chaired by Brescia University's academic dean and the Daviess County schools' curriculum coordinator**
- **Rigor and Relevance discussions among various stakeholder groups, organized by the *Messenger-Inquirer* editor and the business chair at Kentucky Wesleyan College**
- **High school health science program, led by the director of Discover College, the Owensboro Medical Health System, and Owensboro High School**

## Alliance Initiatives


*Teachers in Technology program.* A revival of the Alliance's original "teachers in the workplace" program, this initiative recruits a cadre of about 25 educators from area high schools and colleges each year. These educators make two to three day-long visits to area businesses to learn more about job opportunities and the skills needed to perform these jobs. Prior to the visit, employers receive guidelines on how to structure the visit. At a visitation in the fall of 2007, 21 teachers from high schools, postsecondary institutions and adult education programs visited two establishments for a half-day each: a bio-processing plant and a factory that prepares and ships food items. Participants gave the experience favorable reviews, indicating that they intended to incorporate what they learned into classroom instruction, and/or share the information with students or colleagues. Said one

### Owensboro Alliance Key Partners

BellSouth  
Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corp.  
IBEW 1701  
Green River Area Development District  
Owensboro Medical Health System  
Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer  
Daviess County Government  
Owensboro City Government  
The Learning Community  
Citizens Committee on Education  
Hager Educational Foundation  
Public Life Foundation  
Audubon Area Head Start  
Brescia University  
Kentucky Wesleyan College  
Owensboro Community and Technical College  
Western Kentucky University, Owensboro Campus  
Daviess County Public Schools  
Diocese of Owensboro Schools  
Hancock County Public Schools  
McLean County Public Schools  
Ohio County Public Schools  
Owensboro Public Schools

"All the people are dedicated and sincere in what we are doing. We have a group [that] people feel comfortable in, and they want to be involved. We know we are trying to do something worthwhile, so it's a sense of belonging. You have your superintendents, college presidents—it is a significant group in terms of who is in the room, so you have to say those are the leaders in our community. People feel good about coming into a group like that and that they can freely give opinions and people will listen to them and not put down their ideas. That is a healthy situation and people want to be part of it."

Owensboro Superintendent Larry Vick



teacher, "I have shared with senior students the fact they need to improve their math skills. They were stunned to learn that Algebra 2 is considered as basic math in the business world."

**Rigor and relevance discussions.** The rigor and relevance initiative is a series of discussions with four stakeholder groups: high school teachers, high school students, postsecondary education faculty and community business leaders. The purpose of the discussions is to determine to what extent those groups hold the same understanding of "rigor," "relevance" and "relationships."<sup>1</sup> Two meetings were held in spring 2007. Participants were divided into stakeholder groups and rotated among four different stations. At each, they responded to questions about what rigor, relevance, relationships and a successful high school graduate look like in practice. Generally, all groups supported the concepts of rigor, relevance and relationships in high schools and believe more active involvement from the business community is needed to make the high school experience more relevant. There was general agreement that high school students should possess strong moral values, a strong work ethic and academic competence.

**High school health science program.** A partnership among the P-12 school systems, Owensboro Community and Technical College and the Owensboro Medical Health System explored the possibility of creating a high school health science program to enable high schools students to prepare for health careers. This initiative was created, in part, to fulfill OMHS' anticipated need of more than 500 new nurses over the next five years. During 2006-07,

"One thing [the Alliance has] done is bring people together to look at how we define rigor, relevance, relationships and how do we know when we see it? The reports that they made in the Alliance meeting are really exciting. Another thing is they are having luncheon meetings with the people in the schools that are responsible for curriculum development and the academic deans of the local colleges so that there is a conversation going on about what curriculum needs to be and where we are successful and not. A math committee is looking at requirements that there be a [high school] math course every year, and the number of high school students who have to take college remedial courses. A professor at OCTC and the principal of DCHS have developed a curriculum they are piloting to see how things will go. The one that is exciting for our industry is a study of the process of health sciences. We were looking at results of the people who signed up for the ACT and said they were interested in health careers, but there was no preparation in the high schools. So Owensboro High School has developed a class that they are offering this fall, and every unit was filled to the max. So that is exciting. All of those things could have occurred without the Alliance, but I think the Alliance brought the people together to build support and make contacts."

Joe Overby, Owensboro Medical Health System

members of this committee learned about a similar partnership in another city, sponsored a workshop for representatives of the three partner groups and developed a health science program that began in the fall of 2007 at Owensboro High School, Hancock County High School and Owensboro Community and Technical College.

**High school/postsecondary math project.** This initiative brings together math instructors from Daviess County High School and OCTC to develop and refine mathematics courses. The long-term goal is to reduce the number of students who must take developmental math courses in college. The short-term goal is to ensure consistent expectations for student performance across all levels of education and to develop courses that offer the necessary underpinnings for college success to those students whose test scores indicate that they are not prepared for the next level. The committee developed a plan for a high school math curriculum sequence that was piloted at Daviess County High School during the 2007-08 school year.

**Curriculum roundtable discussions.** The Alliance hosted a series of roundtable luncheons for P-12 and postsecondary faculty to create closer ties between these two groups. The roundtables brought together the academic deans of the four local colleges and universities with curriculum supervisors in the six P-12 school districts. Roundtable discussions included updates from each institution as well as discussion topics identified by the chairs and circulated prior to each meeting. The luncheons proved to be so popular that participants suggested moving from a quarterly to a bi-monthly schedule.

## Challenges

The Alliance has faced several challenges over the years, some of them ongoing:

- **Designating someone to lead the work:** In past years, the Alliance did not always have a paid staff person. An Alliance member commented, "We floundered when we did not have anyone whose job it was to make sure we met and stayed on target." The Alliance's revival was due largely to the work of Helen Mountjoy. Her departure challenged the Alliance to maintain momentum, but leaders hope they have created a viable structure by partnering with the Learning Community to provide staff.



- **Dealing with turnover:** In addition to Mountjoy's leaving for a new position, other leaders in the group have recently retired. Maintaining momentum in the face of turnover within multiple partner groups is an ongoing challenge.
- **Turf issues:** The Alliance has had to work through turf issues prevalent among the various levels of the education system, as well as between the educational system and "outsiders."
- **Active participation of all stakeholder groups:** Regular attendees at Alliance meetings are heavily weighted toward educators. Some members suggested that a stronger business presence is needed and that the group needs representation from parents and students.
- **Need for measurable, timely results:** While Alliance initiatives hold great promise, it is unclear whether there are concrete structures in place to ensure that the initiatives are having an impact. In addition, business and community leaders tend to expect faster results than the education system is accustomed to delivering. The challenge for the Alliance will be to forge some consensus about what results are reasonable, and within what time frame.

When this group first started, we were a very disjointed delivery system. The voc-tech system and the community college system and the school systems were cordial, but there was no commonality, very little shared resources or research. There was very little exchange between peers and...people were not working together in any way, shape or fashion to ensure that we provide our citizenry with transferable credentials from one institution to another. We would not even accept each other's English classes. And what I see now is a greater understanding and respect for a common vision. ... Now we are actively removing barriers for our own citizens to get ahead.

Cindy Fiorella, Dean, Owensboro Community & Technical College

## Reflections

The Alliance has existed in some form for seven years, but the initiatives and focus described above have been in place for a little over a year. Therefore, it is too soon to expect long-term results. What has been successful thus far is that major stakeholders have gotten involved and stayed engaged in the work. Alliance meetings have attracted top leaders from the various partners, and many of them help manage the nitty-gritty work of implementing the initiatives. The continued engagement of these leaders suggests that the Alliance has, at a minimum, succeeded in creating a structure for networking and holding substantive conversations that appear to be leading toward the Alliance's long-term goals. Whether the Alliance can maintain that momentum—or whether the current work will be another chapter in the ebb and flow of school-community engagement—remains to be seen.

<sup>1</sup> Current high school reform models are shaped around the idea that to effectively engage students, high schools must offer rigorous and relevant coursework and students must experience supportive relationships with faculty and fellow students.

The Northern Kentucky region has been unusually successful in generating community and business support for education improvement. Within this context the Kenton County school district has been working for the last few years to improve connections between its high schools and area businesses.

Currently, the district is approaching the work from two related angles. The first strand of work seeks to engage business and community organizations in *curricular planning and support* as the district reorganizes its three high schools into “schools of study” that group students into career-oriented subject clusters and link them with area businesses in related fields. The second strand has more of a resources focus, and seeks to leverage resources from area businesses and the school district in a mutually beneficial way. The case shows both the promise of community engagement with schools and the obstacles to turning that promise into reality.

### The Schools of Study Plan

In the fall of 2007, Kenton County began full implementation of the Schools of Study (SOS) program in the district’s three high schools. A version of the schools-within-a-school concept, the SOS arrangement places all ninth graders in a Freshman Academy to ease students’ transition from middle to high school. Students entering tenth grade are then allowed to choose one of four Schools of Study, each with a different curricular focus:

BIT: Business and Information Technology

VPAM: Visual, Performing Arts and Media

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

LEHHS: Law, Education, Health and Human Services

The idea is that students with similar interests will be more engaged in learning if they work together and if the knowledge and skills associated with their areas of interest are integrated across the high school curriculum. Hence, the language arts courses of the

“Our concern was with the many students who did not complete high school. ...When we did the research, we found we wanted to build high schools where students could connect their aptitude and interests with what they were learning—and not one of our high schools was doing this very well. ...We ended up choosing four different academies that were broad enough to encompass multiple career pathways and that teachers could choose to teach in.”

Kenton County Superintendent Tim Hammer

#### Partnership Schools Initiative

##### Focus Questions for Schools

- Given all forms of assessment data, what is your focus?
- Given that focus, what can you do for yourself?
- What is the district office able to help you do?
- What gaps can the community fill?


STEM SOS would emphasize reading, writing and literature exercises linked to science, technology, engineering and/or math. Organizing the curriculum into career areas creates the opportunity for each SOS to establish relationships with local businesses and community organizations. A fully functioning STEM School of Study, for example, might regularly send students to a local software company for internships or to an area community college or university for dual credit courses. Area companies might in turn send managers to conduct workshops at the schools and invite teachers to visit their companies to better understand the technology applications of STEM subjects.

In developing the SOS program, the district built on earlier efforts to link high schools with local businesses and the community. Between 2001 and 2004, the Partnership at NewCities operated an initiative in eight schools across Kentucky—including Simon Kenton High School—to promote greater community support and involvement in school improvement. The partnership engaged Polly Lusk Page, an educator from the area with extensive experience, to work with Simon Kenton to build relationships and establish connections between teachers and area employers. A key part of her work was to bring groups of educators and employers together to discuss the skills, knowledge and dispositions that students need upon leaving high school to be effective in the work place and to consider how to inculcate all of that into students as part of the schooling process.

Page’s work with Kenton County evolved over time and continued after the Partnership initiative officially ended. By 2006-07,

“To take the SOS to the next level, teachers need to be advised by those who are doing the jobs on a daily basis. ...It is one thing to say, “Make the learning relevant,” but to make it real, [teachers] have to be influenced by those doing that work. So we started having business people in to advise us within each SOS at each school.”

Tim Hanner



she had organized a teacher externship program to enable 12-15 teachers from each high school to spend a half or full day in area businesses related to the SOS program they would join. The externships were designed to offer teachers the opportunity to talk to and observe professionals on the job to help them more effectively connect student learning with career interests, hence increasing student engagement in school. She also served as a liaison with the business community and brought together more than 60 individuals from business and industry, as well as community and civic organizations, to engage in four separate conversations with faculty from Kenton's three area high schools. These conversations were structured to help educators and non-educators envision the types of relationships that could exist between schools and area organizations. An administrator from one of the high schools spoke of how helpful it had been to have a business liaison assist the school in establishing business linkages:

*Polly has really helped make contact with businesses. She knows how to speak their language, and she already had some relationships in the business community that she could utilize. ...It has been so much easier for someone in my role; now I don't have to worry about being the PR guy and finding businesses.*

Though Kenton administrators and teachers have together developed the SOS design over the past few years, and received assistance from the Partnership, the three high schools are just phasing in the plan. Freshman academics were established in the 2006-07 school year, and students and teachers will be adjusting to the new arrangement for some time. One of the more noteworthy aspects of the Kenton SOS story, in fact, is the highly collaborative, well structured and patient approach that district officials have taken to create the program over several years—featuring vision teams at the district and school levels—and with considerable input from educators around the country who have operated similarly designed schools. This helps explain why the district has been able to reorganize its three high schools rather dramatically with a minimum of resistance.

It is too early to determine how effective the SOS model will be in improving student engagement or learning. What does seem clear is that moving beyond simply receiving input from employers and organizations to establishing reciprocal relationships between them and the schools will be a time-consuming and difficult process. District officials are using what they call an adaptive change process regarding SOS implementation, meaning they will work with teachers and administrators to determine the best rate of change for each school. Such a phase-in process can be full of ambiguity and confusion, as all involved struggle to adopt the

new model without too much disruption. For example, as schools got into the nitty-gritty of planning units and lessons within their SOS in the fall of 2007, one school cancelled its plan to invite business leaders to a professional development day because teachers had too much work to do, and school leaders were uncertain how best to involve business leaders in the day's activities. As the school year progressed, however, students themselves began pressing teachers to incorporate more material from outside the traditional curriculum into lessons, and many SOS unit teachers moved rapidly to respond to these requests. These developments point to the thoughtful planning and negotiation that will be required to involve business and community leaders in more substantive work, beyond merely giving input about general school outcomes.


## Understanding Business: The Role of a Marketer

According to district officials, Kenton County's collaboration with the Partnership at NewCities over the years prompted leaders to alter their thinking in at least two major respects. First, they realized that improving high schools would require more than simple tinkering—this conviction led to the SOS redesign plan. Second, the district realized it needed someone with roots in the business sector to help educators and the broader community re-conceptualize the relationship between schools and the community.

In the summer of 2007, the district hired Sara Zepf to fill the newly created, district-level position of business liaison. Zepf brought to the post a communications degree from Northern Kentucky University as well as marketing experience with both the Cincinnati Bengals and the Cincinnati Reds. Hailing from a family of educators and having worked with the local sanitation district on education initiatives, Sara was a good match for the role of school-business liaison.

Although the district's links with the business community through the SOS program are focused on curricular issues, Sara's work also included finding additional resources. According to a district official, this approach to business partnerships is connected to the SOS program, but not really the same thing:

*[Hiring a business liaison] grew out of our need to look at how to do a better job as a district in marketing ourselves and generating additional funding, which we needed because of SOS. So we told [Sara], "Initially, we want you to work with SOS because they have so many needs other than textbooks." One high school spent \$25,000 on supplies for SOS. We knew we had to have some new resources if we want to make this a quality program, so we thought, "How can we market this to make it a win-win?"*



*Staffing the work:* School administrators and teachers have their hands full with instruction, student supervision, SOS planning and organizing meetings. While SOS lead teachers have been influential in implementing the design, it is unclear whether these individuals can establish necessary business and community linkages without additional support. Nor can a central office representative, however effective, create the relationships necessary to have SOS units at all three high schools functioning effectively. Similarly, many employers do not know how to integrate high school students into their work in educationally meaningful ways. The Quizno's relationship represented a success story, but it required time and resource commitments that not all schools and businesses can spare. Creative thinking around resources will be needed to staff this kind of work to the level necessary for it to succeed.

*Sustaining district and school leadership:* Kenton County has been fortunate to have a strong central office leadership team in place for several years, with a deep commitment to enhancing school-business partnerships. But changes in this team—a common occurrence in school districts—could have harmful effects on the program.

*Integrating the program with regional school improvement efforts:* Although Kenton's central office leaders and high school principals seem to understand how Schools of Study fit within area-wide initiatives such as Vision 2015, many teachers did not discuss their school-business engagement work as part of the larger effort. This suggests that teachers are isolated from the P-16 discussions going on around them and implies that establishing viable, long-term relationships among businesses, communities and schools could be more difficult than many leaders hope.

## Reflections


The success of Kenton County's school-business linkage efforts depends on educators at all levels being able to break with business as usual. The district's initial success is encouraging, but substantial additional work will be necessary to break out of the division of labor in the community around education and to connect the SOS work in Kenton County with the school improvement activities across the entire Northern Kentucky region.

The district must also seriously examine its human resource needs to fulfill the promise of the SOS design. Ideally an individual would be placed in each high school to focus on cultivating relationships and exchange programs with businesses and organizations and also to work on needed modifications at the schools to enable students to come and go. While less desirable, the district might

employ a single network expert to serve all three high schools. The district might even consider contracting with one or more individuals to serve this function. Without rethinking the staffing needs of typical high schools, the SOS concept is unlikely to reach its full potential.

Finally, the district is in a unique position in its employment of a marketing expert and could learn lessons about school-business linkages that would be valuable elsewhere in the state and nation. We hope the district will be thoughtful in its use of its marketing expert, will support her as she explores her role in the schools and the community, and will provide ample opportunities for her position to be studied and for others to learn from the district's experiences with her.

<sup>1</sup>Quiznos is a sandwich shop franchise.



Sara's initial work has focused on helping district and school personnel understand how to seek help from businesses. Her activities in the fall of 2007 illustrated the potential as she worked with Dixie Heights High School to obtain funding and sponsorship from the Quiznos<sup>1</sup> corporate unit. Quiznos made a donation to the school for specific education supports; in exchange the school made Quiznos the corporate sponsor for its homecoming celebration. Quiznos became more deeply involved by inviting students from the Business and Information Technology SOS to develop marketing plan ideas for the homecoming. Quiznos officials joined with BIT teachers to judge the plans, and the best elements were implemented as part of the homecoming. This generated significant publicity for Quiznos, which had recently opened a new store a few blocks from Dixie Heights, and gave the company a concrete way to support the school. A Quiznos official had this to say about her experience working with the high school:

*We were just amazed about how willing they were to have us come in. I'll be honest, at first I thought we were making a donation. But what I realized, the donation we made in the grand scheme of things was really small for them because the needs are so high. But I never felt they were considering that. I felt they were eager to learn about us and work with us and see how we can develop a relationship. ...Without a doubt the time and money we spent with them has been worth it.*

Based on her background in marketing, her experience with the Quiznos project, and her work in the district office, Sara developed guidelines for Kenton County schools to use in seeking funding support from private sector businesses and organizations. Called The Excellence Initiative, the plan was billed as a call for businesses to participate to ensure that those entering the job market would be well-prepared. The plan emphasized the publicity and advertising benefits that companies can derive from relationships with schools, such as that involving Quiznos.

The Excellence Initiative was presented to business leaders at a focus group with district leaders, held at Dixie Heights High School in the fall of 2007. While business leaders have generally supported Sara's perspective, they made clear that many businesses are willing to make donations to schools without expecting publicity in return. But they stressed the importance of schools approaching them with specific, strategic requests for assistance, not simply general pleas for \$500 or \$1,000. They also emphasized how valuable it is for schools to treat business people's time as a precious commodity. They were especially appreciative of Dixie Heights' approach to hosting the focus group. Namely, students were on hand to direct outsiders to visitor parking spaces and accompany them into the building, and to give them coffee and muffins. Business leaders expressed appre-

ciation for such treatment and also for the opportunity to be heard by the highest-ranking officials in the district. One business leader remarked: "It was positive to open the meeting with, 'We are here to listen to you.' Other activities like this that I have been to, we have not been given much opportunity to contribute."

During the 2007-08 academic year, Kenton's SOS group also established curricular initiatives with Ryland Homes, with engineers affiliated with Northern Kentucky University and with various other area businesses and organizations as well. The SOS initiative will be an important effort to watch and study in the coming years. District officials report that a critical lesson has been that high school students can actively learn from the real, live problems of practice that are embedded in the day-to-day work of businesses and organizations. Providing such problems for local students to grapple with will be a major goal of the district in the coming years of SOS implementation.

## Challenges

As noted, Kenton County's experiments in improving school-business linkages are in their infancy, and it is too soon to comment with authority upon their prospects. However, we see numerous challenges the district may face:

**Curricular vs. marketing linkages:** The district's attempts to link business and community organizations to its SOS program are moving both sides into uncharted territory. Kenton County's approach to this kind of linkage seems thoughtful in considering how partnerships with business and community organizations can benefit both sides and in using both a business liaison and marketing expert to facilitate the process. The challenge will be to develop both curricular and marketing linkages more fully and to integrate them in a way that satisfies the joint need of the school district and the community to produce well-educated citizens.

**Overcoming historical barriers:** Developing meaningful and ongoing linkages with the business community as part of the SOS program will be difficult not just because of human resource needs, but because of historical barriers to businesses and schools working together around curricular issues. We heard repeatedly in interviews that schools and businesses do not really know how to talk to one another and do not even know how to ask each other for assistance. Also, connecting high schools in meaningful ways to the worlds of work and postsecondary learning requires new thinking and new structures that are beyond what most educators have considered. This might be the appropriate next task for the district vision team that brought the SOS concept to Kenton County originally.



# Creating an Environment for Student Success: The Elements of a Strong School Culture

## Lessons Learned

Creating an environment that supports and nurtures all adults and children is essential, but it must be accompanied by a focus on helping each student achieve specific, challenging academic goals. This focus organizes the work of the school and is the basis on which staff and faculty are hired, retained and evaluated.

### Is it your goal to.....

Support students in ways that help them reach challenging academic standards?

Select and support a staff that is capable of helping students reach these standards?

### Then what do you need?

- A school leader who has a single-minded focus on student learning and can coach staff in a supportive (not authoritarian) way to ensure that all students meet challenging standards
- Faculty members who are committed to all students meeting challenging standards
- Data that are used to identify each student's academic strengths and weaknesses and are the basis of strategies that focus on each student's continual progress
- Support and training that teachers need to nurture each student and to help each student achieve at the highest levels
- Regular evaluation of teachers' abilities to support students and facilitate student achievement
- Staff training in how to create a positive school culture
- Consistent benchmarking of progress in improving school culture

As Kentucky schools continue their efforts to improve the academic achievement of all students, many teachers and principals are recognizing the relationship between their school's culture and the results of their work. Research has increasingly shown that environment has a measurable impact on how well students learn. This attention to creating a positive culture focuses on such elements as high expectations for students, a caring atmosphere, a safe environment, communicating with families and a commitment to equity and diversity.

Many schools throughout the Commonwealth have developed a successful formula for creating a strong culture. Others, however, continue struggling to find and incorporate new strategies into the way they educate their students.

## Exactly what does a successful school culture look like?

To provide answers to that question, the Partnership for Successful Schools commissioned a review of four elementary schools that have been remarkably successful in helping low-income students achieve at high levels. These schools, part of an earlier research project, were among eight that had been visited by state audit teams in the spring of 2004; all scored very high on the "school culture" component of the state audit.

The initial research was conducted by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence under a Ford Foundation grant. When those findings were released in the report "Inside the Black Box of High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools," the Partnership decided to build on its own long-standing work on school culture by taking a closer look at the specific cultural elements involved in these schools. Patricia J. Kannapel, one of the researchers involved in the earlier work, conducted a series of interviews as part of an additional review of:

- **Brodhead Elementary School**, 400 students, located in Rockcastle County in the Appalachian foothills; 57 percent of students on free/reduced lunch
- **McFerran Preparatory Academy**, Jefferson County, a downtown Louisville school with 550 students; 83 percent of students on free/reduced lunch
- **Morgan Elementary School**, Paducah Independent, an urban neighborhood school in western Kentucky with 235 students; 86 percent of students on free/reduced lunch
- **Oak Grove Elementary School**, 635 students, located in southeastern Kentucky's Whitley County; 83 percent of students on free/reduced lunch



## What Do The Schools Have In Common?

Not surprisingly, several components of a successful school culture were found in each of the schools:

- School personnel of high quality, dedication and a strong work ethic
- Personal connections within the schools and with students' families
- High expectations reflected in a strong focus on instruction and student achievement
- Specific and deliberate strategies that included aligning curriculum, analyzing data and teamwork

### Personnel

Nearly everyone interviewed at each of the schools spoke of the role that personnel play in their school's success. Specific references were made to the leadership of the principal and the quality of the teaching staff.

The principals at all four schools were highly regarded by teachers, parents and district administrators. Each of them also had a longstanding connection with the school, although the nature of the connection differed across the sites.

Faculty members also cited specific things the principals did that enhanced their leadership:

- Sharing in decision-making
- Listening to teachers and protecting their instructional time
- Supporting teachers with materials, professional development and moral support
- Focusing on student learning
- Showing concern for students and their families

Many people attributed their school's success to a high-quality teaching staff. Principals were given credit for strong recruitment and hiring practices, support for new teachers and easing out teachers who did not fit the school culture. Principals took all possible measures to avoid having to accept or hire teachers about whom they knew nothing. They also learned several ways to avoid being forced to take on teachers they knew to be ineffective. All the principals were proactive about filling vacancies—they didn't sit back and wait to see who came their way.

Principals and teachers at the two more urban schools said they only hired teachers who wanted to work with inner-city students. Experience had taught them that teachers who are competent in less urban settings may not do as well if they are not committed to working with poor, urban students.

## Personal Connections

The schools shared a sense of personal connections within the school, and the relationships extended to students' families. The long-standing connections of staff and parents to the rural schools provided a deep commitment that was rarer in urban settings. In the urban schools, however, the principals and staff created personal connections through their commitment to the school, to one another and to students and families.

Each of the schools had a caring, nurturing atmosphere: among adults, from adults to children, among children and from school to families. Faculty and parents alike described the schools as welcoming places. The rural schools had active parent volunteers. Principals at the two urban schools also mentioned the importance of being respectful of parents and treating them like customers.

## High Expectations

Reaching the levels of academic success recorded by these schools meant that they had to do more than simply love the children. All four schools focused very strongly on instruction and student achievement. State auditors and school faculty commented about the high expectations for students in all the schools.

High expectations was not just a platitude. Teachers clearly were aware that they should subscribe to the belief that all children can achieve at high levels. But in practice the significant impact came from the teachers behaving *as if* all of their students would achieve at high levels. This led them to look closely at what each child was doing and figure out what it would take to help each child achieve. What they found in all cases was that the children surprised them with what they were able to do. As a result, teacher expectations increased.

## Specific Strategies

The schools used a number of specific strategies to make a difference for their students. Those common to all the schools were aligning curriculum, analyzing data and teamwork.

Aligning curriculum in these schools meant making sure to cover Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment, the document that spells out the content on which students will be tested. The process involved becoming intimately familiar with the Core Content, determining who would teach what and making sure there were no gaps.

Aligning curriculum with the Core Content ensured that students were exposed to the required content. Knowing that they actually learned it required analyzing test data—something that all four schools did regularly.

All of the schools devoted a large part of their professional development each year to a detailed analysis of the school's performance on the state test. This helped them identify areas of weakness and develop classroom strategies and additional professional development to address the weaknesses. But to improve learning for all students, these

schools found that they had to go the extra step of regularly analyzing how individual students were doing, and then making classroom adjustments to meet their needs.

Everyone working together toward a common goal of improved achievement was very important in the schools. The teamwork was accomplished through deliberate efforts that brought teachers together. Team planning time at all schools provided professional development during the school day for data analysis and for teachers to discuss individual students and/or instructional strategies.

## The Impact of Kentucky's School Improvement Efforts

Attitudes toward Kentucky's school improvement efforts—including the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA)—were decidedly ambivalent at the four schools. But it was clear that school reform measures enacted by the legislature were instrumental in the evolution of the schools' cultures. All had reportedly been caring, supportive places for many years, but the school reform law of 1990 gave a different focus to their work.

This influence was felt most strongly through the testing and accountability components, but other aspects of the law also moved the schools forward: the ungraded primary program, new professional development, additional resources and anti-nepotism measures.

It would be difficult to overstate the impact of testing and accountability on the schools. The requirement that schools show a specific level of improvement on the state test each year led to curriculum alignment and data analysis. Other aspects of school reform contributed to some of the schools' successful culture development. Brodhead and Oak Grove began teacher teaming as a requirement of the ungraded primary program and have continued the practice over the years. Additional funding available after 1990 allowed Oak Grove to supply all the materials and professional development that teachers needed. Anti-nepotism measures passed by the legislature, coupled with higher academic standards, were noted for professionalizing hiring practices in the two rural districts.

## Unique Characteristics

Although the schools shared many characteristics, some strategies played a unique role in the individual school's success:

- 1 Morgan relied heavily on its teachers for instructional leadership.

- 2 Faculty at McFerran and Oak Grove cited the important role played by their extended school services programs in helping move individual students forward.
- 3 Central office support was very important for Brodhead and Oak Grove.
- 4 Brodhead faculty cited reduced class sizes as contributing to their success.
- 5 Specific professional development programs at Brodhead and McFerran were mentioned as key factors in developing the schools' cultures.

## Conclusion

Information from these four successful schools could give the impression that they are perfect places, with cultures in place that are unattainable for most schools. But it is important to remember that none of these schools was stellar when the reform effort began. Some key developments helped the schools create successful cultures, and these came in a kind of sequence:

1. The statewide reform law forced schools to pay attention to student achievement in a very targeted way.
2. When reform passed, or shortly thereafter, the schools were led by committed principals who were willing to make a good faith effort to implement the reform.
3. The principals realized early that they had to have the best teachers to improve student achievement, and they developed strategies for recruiting and retaining such teachers.
4. The schools' teachers learned the state's Core Content in detail and made sure that it was addressed and that everyone knew which part they should be teaching.
5. School staff began analyzing test data to understand what they were doing well and where they needed to improve; eventually, they began to conduct detailed analyses of individual student data to determine what each student needed to move forward.

Through it all, faculty and staff at the schools maintained a remarkable commitment to the school, to one another and to the students and their families. This commitment helped them suspend disbelief and behave as if all students would achieve at high levels.

But none of this happened overnight, and the work is not yet finished for these schools. Only one has reached the goal set by the state, although all are very close. What the schools have going for them now, however, is the knowledge that they can make a difference with students because they have done it already.





## Partnership for Successful Schools



### KIRIS Performance

	1991 baseline	1992-94	1994-96	1996-98
Brodhead	31.5	<b>51.6</b>	<b>65.6</b>	<b>64.3</b>
McFerran	33.4	36.5	<b>47.3</b>	41.6
Morgan	30.3	33.0	44.1	46.7
Oak Grove	30.8	37.3	45.4	44.6
State average	33.9	41.5	45.6	48.9

**BOLD denotes scores above the state average.**

### CATS Performance

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Brodhead	<b>86.5</b>	<b>85.6</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>93.4</b>	<b>101.3</b>	<b>106.6</b>	<b>109.2</b>	<b>111.3</b>
McFerran	58.9	64.1	<b>71.8</b>	70.9	<b>80.4</b>	<b>89.8</b>	<b>87.6</b>	<b>91.9</b>
Morgan				74.4	<b>84.1</b>	<b>87.3</b>	<b>87.5</b>	<b>90.5</b>
Oak Grove	63.7	<b>70.8</b>	<b>78.1</b>	<b>77.8</b>	<b>86.3</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>90.6</b>	<b>89.8</b>
State avg.	66.5	68.4	70.9	72.9	76.1	81.5	81.5	84.7

**BOLD denotes scores above the state average.**

\*The KIRIS testing program (Kentucky Instructional Results Information System) was enacted as part of the Kentucky Education Reform law of 1990. In 1999 the program was replaced with the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS).

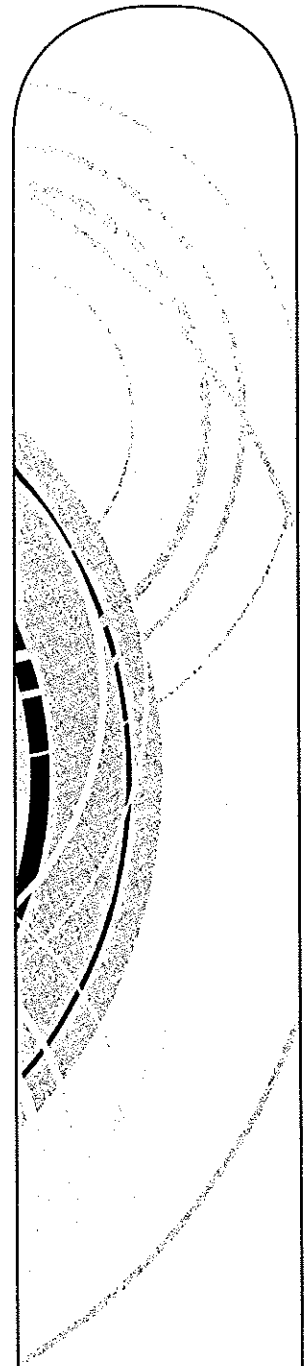
#### Research Methods

Data from the Prichard Committee research were available for this project. These data included school audit reports, interviews with audit team members and school principals and field notes from researchers. With these data in hand, each of the four schools was visited for a full day. Each principal recommended for interviews people in the district who were intimately familiar with the school's history and culture. The number of people interviewed at each site ranged from seven to 14. The list at each school included the principal and several teachers and may also have included district administrators, retired principals, non-certified staff and parents/community members.

These people were asked to describe their history with the school as well as the school's history in the community. Each was asked a series of questions about the characteristics of the school culture and how it developed, key factors in the

school's success and what advice they would offer to other schools. (The list of questions is available online at [www.pfss.org](http://www.pfss.org).) They also were asked about specific strategies the interviewers thought might be important in building the school culture.

Interviews from each school were analyzed and cases written independently. The factors identified by each person were categorized for each school, and a set of key features of the culture identified. These features served as an outline for the case study. This analysis was done separately for each school to identify the unique features of its culture. The cases were then compared and contrasted to compose this overview. The full case studies are available online at [www.partnershipforsuccessfulschools.org](http://www.partnershipforsuccessfulschools.org). The project was conducted with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Editing assistance was provided by Diana J. Taylor, Frankfort, KY.





# McFerran Preparatory Academy: Principal Leadership and Community

## The School's Development

Schools don't get much more urban than McFerran Preparatory Academy. Located five minutes from downtown Louisville, McFerran is surrounded by a housing project, a series of industries and warehouses, and an adult entertainment area. But McFerran is not a typical urban school.

In the midst of its urban landscape, McFerran is a mecca to the 600-plus students it serves, and to their families. In addition to providing a supportive environment, the school has distinguished itself in recent years through its students' academic performance. But high achievement hasn't always been the norm for McFerran. Until recently, McFerran's scores on the state test were at or below the state average—a performance that threatened McFerran's positive reputation.

But the school's community refused to believe that their students could not succeed. By 2006, the school had nearly reached the state goal and virtually eliminated the achievement gap between students with different economic backgrounds and between white and African-American students.

## A Turning Point

When McFerran's state test scores declined a few years back, principal Carol Miller's reaction was one of devastation. But the declining scores also served as a catalyst for change. Fellow principal Rosemarie Young remembered how the scores pushed McFerran's staff in a different direction.

*It gave a wake-up call. Carol went back to the school with that information and they got to work. ...They got into...embedded professional development, analyzing what they were doing, looking at student work, being really focused on the Core Content and getting ready for the assessment. I trace it all back to the meeting when we got those test scores.*

## Focused Academic Support

While McFerran had been a caring and supportive school for many years, student achievement was not stellar until the school became focused on the academic program. This came about through three processes: aligning the curriculum with Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment, analyzing the school's assessment data and analyzing the performance of individual students.

District resource teacher Marty Johnson noted that an important shift for the school was to begin looking at the performance of individual students.

*We knew we had to get beyond state test data and look regularly at what individual students were doing. ...That is when Wednesday in-house PD started. We met with grade groups once every three weeks to look at students' work, and that is essentially what helped us turn it around.*

Students who were performing at a low level were given more attention. District official Theresa Jensen described McFerran as "a place of equity, not equality," in the sense that students who needed the most help received the most help.

## High Expectations

As McFerran teachers began looking closely at what individual students needed, student achievement began to increase at a faster rate, and this led to higher expectations of students—something that became evident to others in the district. Former district principal Carletta Bell commented:

*Everyone says, "All children can learn." At McFerran, it is more than that. It is, "No, they will succeed." They have an attitude of not giving up on any child.*

## Commitment

Another important characteristic of the school culture is the strong sense of commitment on the part of the principal, faculty and staff to the school and its students and families. Teacher Carol Gray noted:

*We feel a sense of accomplishment in working with these urban children. ... I can't imagine working with different kinds of kids other than our little urban kids who maybe haven't had a good meal since last Friday. They need our love and support, not just our ability to teach the academics. You need to have a commitment to the children. If you don't have that, you won't last here too long.*

## Quality Teachers

A good deal of thought and strategy has gone into ensuring that McFerran has a high-quality teaching staff. This process has four components:

- 1) keeping good teachers
- 2) recruiting and hiring good teachers
- 3) helping teachers develop their skills
- 4) easing out teachers who are not doing the job

McFerran teacher Elaine Rahm, who has been at McFerran 37 years, said that turnover was high before Miller became principal.

*Then when Ms. Miller got here, she knew the type of people she was looking for and went after those people. She tells them up front what we are dealing with here. That has helped a great deal.*

The strong collegial support teachers receive has been instrumental in keeping good teachers. Word spread that McFerran is a supportive place for teachers, and there are always plenty of applicants for the few vacancies that occur.

When vacancies occur, a proactive approach is taken. The school has strong relationships with nearby universities and receives many student teachers—creating an applicant pool that helps identify talented teachers. The main characteristic principal Miller looks for in hiring teachers is the desire to work with inner city children. If they have that desire, they can develop the skills they need to teach effectively.

Miller has made some tough decisions when teachers didn't measure up. Several administrative colleagues commented on her willingness to replace teachers who were not performing. Said former colleague Bell, "she is not afraid to do the work that needs to be done to move a person out of the profession."

### Community of Faculty, Staff, Parents, Students

High standards at McFerran work hand-in-hand with a sense of community that permeates the building and extends to families. The caring, respectful attitude of McFerran staff toward parents and students is an important part of the school's culture. Former assistant superintendent Bernard Minnis noted that parent outreach is important to establishing McFerran's school culture.

*There are communities that are pretty tough in this city, and if the principal is afraid to go into the housing projects and the homes, that will send a message to the community. ...Carol [Miller] would go out into the community and expect her teachers to go out and not be afraid of people when they came into the building. That respect of the community is conveyed to parents, and they will trust her.*

The respect toward families is also shown toward students. Parent Pam Sutton spoke of "the loving and caring attitude they have with each child." District resource teacher Johnson noted that "Carol is very particular about kind words and raised voices."

### Leadership

All of the characteristics of McFerran's culture were created and facilitated by a dedicated leader. Carol Miller has been principal at the school for more than 25 years and now greets as parents some of her former students. Many district leaders got their start under Miller. Every person interviewed for this report attributed the school's success very strongly, although not exclusively, to her leadership.

But what, specifically, does Miller do that makes her a strong leader? According to those familiar with the school, she is devoted to the children and to the staff. She does not ask anyone to do work that she does not do herself. She is resourceful, a natural learner, and reaches out to families. Because she has such strong people skills and walks the talk, staff and students follow her lead out of sheer respect, and district officials respond to her requests. Veteran teacher Carol Gray shared these comments about Carol Miller's leadership:

*What makes McFerran what it is has a lot to do with Carol Miller. ... She is here most nights until 9 or 10 o'clock. She is the instructional leader, but she also can get down and dirty. There is not a job in this school she has not done, including mopping the floors and cleaning the toilets. And as she does an outstanding job, she builds loyalty, and there is tremendous loyalty here to her and to each other as a staff.*

Ken Draut, director of planning and evaluation for the school district, pointed out that there is substance to Miller's leadership:

*A lot of our principals are nurturing, but they don't combine it with that data-driven piece, where they say, "I love you, I will get you in the right spot so we can raise student achievement." She does [that] superbly.*

This effusive praise might conjure up images of a super-human. But the reality is that visitors could confuse Carol Miller with the office staff. Former colleague Carletta Bell spoke of her unassuming manner.

*Carol does not seek recognition. ...As far as her stepping out at principal meetings, if somebody gets a chance to say what they did, Carol is not going to do that. She just quietly goes about doing what needs to be done, and that is because she is not doing it for herself and her staff, but for the kids.*

### Conclusion

Over a period of 20-plus years, McFerran Elementary transformed from a place where few might choose to be to a warm, nurturing community of learners. This was accomplished not through a major overhaul, but through incremental steps driven by the commitment and determination of principal Carol Miller and the faculty and staff that she helped cultivate. If one had to single out the main ingredient in the school's progress, it might be the one pointed out most often by Carol Miller herself—a faculty and staff that want to work with inner city children. But there is more to the school's success than that. McFerran faculty and staff care enough about their students to do the hard work of helping them reach higher levels of achievement than many thought possible. ■■■

## PUBLICATIONS, PROGRAMS, AND SERVICES

### **Encouraging Community Involvement in Education**

*How Students Learn Best: In Safe and Welcoming Schools*, explores ways to create a school environment that ensures both safety and learning.

*Turn Up The Volume*, a detailed guide to involving students in conversations about their learning

*Ready for Work: Essential Skills for Kentucky Jobs*, reports that share the perspectives of employers, teachers, parents, and students on what will be expected of students after they leave high school and how well prepared they are for those challenges.

*Building and Sustaining Learning Communities: A Professional Development Resource Guide*, information on the critical importance of quality professional development for teachers and ways to ensure that it is a local priority.

*The Learning = Earning Employee Communications Packet*, a variety of materials employers can use to help their employees support their schools.

*Difficult Ground*, a guide on how to get more community leaders to run for local school boards.

*Kentucky Learning Talks: Stories of Successful Schools*, a summary of visits to eight successful schools during the 2001-02 academic year. The program was designed by the Kentucky Department of Education, the Partnership for Successful Schools, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, and the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce.

*Want to Make a Difference*, outlines roles and responsibilities of serving on local school boards, as well as the rewards and challenges of serving, and offers suggestions on ways to get involved at the local level.

### **Keeping the Public Informed**

*From Dilemma to Opportunity*. A two-volume, five-year report on the Partnership and reform in Kentucky.

*Champion for Student Success: The 10-Year History of the Partnership for Successful Schools*, a look at the Partnership's past involvement in the school reform effort and the challenges it sees in the future.

*Newspaper advertisements that focus on school improvement*. ads that have been published in the *Lexington Herald-Leader* for the last six years and that have been made available for publication in other Kentucky newspapers.

## **Supporting the Work of Educators**

*Content-Focused Professional Development in Kentucky: A Study of the Middle School Summer Academies* by G. Williamson McDiarmid, Patricia Kannapel, Jane David, and Pamela Coe, 2003.

*Improving Low-Performing Schools: A Study of Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educator Program* by Jane David, Pamela Coe, and Patricia Kannapel, 2003.

*Building Effective Professional Development Systems: A Conference Report* by Kelly Mazzoli, 2001.

*The Kentucky Leadership Academy: Training School Administrators to be Instructional Leaders* by Pamela Coe and Lois Adams-Rodgers, 2000.

*District Leadership in Professional Development: Exemplary Cases* by Jane David, G. Williamson McDiarmid and Thomas Corcoran, 2000.

*Mapping Professional Development Opportunities: A Pilot Study of Two Subjects in Three Regions* by Thomas Corcoran, Clair Passantino, and Gail B. Gerry, 2000.

*The Influence of Distinguished Educators on School Improvement: A Study of Kentucky's School Intervention Program* by Jane David, Patricia Kannapel, and G. Williamson McDiarmid, 2000.

*Still Missing After All These Years: Understanding the Paucity of Subject-Matter Professional Development* by G. Williamson McDiarmid, 1999.

*The Road to Improvement: Conference Report on Interventions in Low-Performing Schools* by Jane David, 1999.

*Shifting Gears: Providing Professional Development that Promotes High Academic Performance* by Thomas Corcoran, 1998.

*Professional Development under KERA: Meeting the Challenge* by G. Williamson McDiarmid, Jane David, Thomas Corcoran, Pamela Coe, and Patricia Kannapel, 1997.

*Realizing New Learning for All Students: A Framework for the Professional Development of Kentucky Teachers* by G. Williamson McDiarmid, 1994.

Partnership Coaching Training by the Partnership for Successful Schools and Roberts and Kay, Inc., prepares people who provide assistance, training, and support in the complicated, long-term education improvement process.

## Examples of Quality Business Involvement

- Asking entry level employees for evidence of their academic progress (transcripts, writing portfolio examples, interview questions around what they are studying, completing on-demand writing exercises, etc.).
- Convening meeting with educators, students, parents, and business leaders to have a dialogue about what is needed in the work force—regardless of whether students are entering the work force directly out of high school or after a two- or four-year postsecondary experience.
- Distributing information at the worksite that challenges employees to be involved in their schools and in the educational lives of their children. Examples include enclosing education information payroll envelopes (i.e., Questions to Ask at a School Conference), providing information in break rooms, and providing brown-bag seminars at noon or break times for employees.
- Hiring teachers during summer months or on school breaks in order for them to learn more about the current “world of work” expectations.
- Providing training for certified and classified school staff members. Examples might include telephone training for school secretaries or providing technology training for teachers and other staff.
- Sharing business leadership training with superintendents, principals, and teachers: finance, personnel, strategic planning, media, technology, time management.
- Providing one-to-one reading support for primary students who are at risk of academic failure.
- Creating problem solving scenarios to help students understand what is expected in the work world, especially in the areas of math, science, creative and higher-order thinking, communication, and writing.
- Upgrading career day and tours of companies to provide challenging problem-solving experiences that engage students and enhance the connection between school and the world of work.
- Providing support for teachers to pursue National Board Certification.
- Providing release time for parents to attend school conferences, to serve on school councils and school boards, and to volunteer in the classroom.

- Rewarding and recognizing schools and individuals for the academic progress they have made, focusing on non-traditional incentives.
- Developing a speakers bureau of employers and employees.
- Participating in structured mentoring programs.
- Providing financial support—research, public information, program resources, preparation of teachers.

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

**Leaders for Change Decade Award** from the Council for Aid to Education

*"Rarely has the Council come across a program so bold, systemic, and long-lasting that it merits special acknowledgment."*

**Outstanding Partnership Leader in the United States** from National Association of Partners in Education and McKee Foods Corp.

*Awarded to Carolyn Witt Jones, executive director of the Partnership, for serving as "the driving force behind the Partnership's consistent, targeted work to unite the diverse needs of education, business and the community in support of Kentucky's schools."*

**Business Coalition of the Year Award** from the National Alliance of Business

*Given to business-led coalitions that have made outstanding contributions to improving student achievement.*

**Best in Class Award** from The Conference Board

*"We felt that the Partnership for Successful Schools was an honest representation of corporate effort to make fundamental change in education...We felt the amount of commitment these companies and their CEOs made was outstanding."*

**Learning and Liberty Award** from the Kentucky School Public Relations Association

*For making "a significant contribution to education."*

**The William T. Nallia Award** from the Kentucky Association of School Administrators

*For "visionary leadership which has contributed significantly to the quality of public elementary and secondary education in Kentucky."*

**Kentucky School Boards Friends Award**

*In recognition of continued leadership and support for Kentucky's public schools.*

**Star Award** from AEL (Appalachian Educational Laboratory)

*For excellence in teaching and learning.*



## WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

"THE PARTNERSHIP for Successful Schools is undoubtedly one of the most effective business support groups for education anywhere in the country and is a model for such organizations. The positive influence the Partnership has had on educational opportunities for Kentucky students is due to exceptional leadership and inclusive approaches to addressing challenges."

*Bill McDiarmid  
Boeing Professor of Teacher Education  
University of Washington, Seattle*

"WHENEVER engagement of the business community was vital to the conversation and future direction of an initiative, I also knew having the Partnership for Successful Schools at the table would add the value we were looking for. The Partnership has been at many "tables" over the past 14 years, and continues to serve as the "critical friend" to educators at all levels. Its commitment to high quality education for all Kentucky's citizens is without parallel."

*Lois Adams-Rodgers  
Retired Deputy Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Education  
Special Assistant to the Executive Director  
Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC*

"THE PARTNERSHIP for Successful Schools is an invaluable resource supporting the Commonwealth's comprehensive P-16 reform efforts. We invariably turn to the Partnership to link our education agenda to the concerns and resources of the business community. Executive Director Carolyn Witt Jones regularly convenes policymakers in education, economic development, and state government to help us all coordinate our work and translate key reform issues into terms that local communities will understand and appreciate. We are fortunate to have this unique organization."

*Dianne Bazell, Ph.D.  
Assistant Vice President, Academic Affairs  
Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education*

"THE WORK of the Partnership is focused on what schools in Kentucky need in order to reach proficiency by 2014. Its work is a systemic approach to school improvement rather than a "program" or "initiative." It makes real connections among school, community, government, business and industry. The Partnership has worked to produce models that schools/districts can use to accomplish their goals. Students, teachers, administrators, parents and communities will benefit from all of these efforts for many years to come."

*Tim Hanner, Deputy Superintendent  
Kenton County Schools  
Erlanger, Kentucky*

"THE PARTNERSHIP" for Successful Schools has an impressive history of commitment to strengthening and improving public education in the Commonwealth. It is dedicated to promoting public understanding and sustained support for the quality education required to prepare today's students to be tomorrow's involved citizens and productive workers.

The Partnership has been striking in its willingness to work with other organizations and coordinate efforts for the benefit of Kentucky's children. Because opposition has arisen and programs crucial to educational opportunity are being cut, the Partnership's voice will be more important than ever as Kentucky tries to ensure educational opportunity and a better future for all of its citizens."

*Molly A. Hunter  
Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc.  
New York, New York*

"THE PARTNERSHIP for Successful Schools has provided me, as a parent who has been heavily involved in public schools in Kentucky since the early 90's, with excellent information and updates that strengthened my understanding about the schools in Kentucky. As the chair of the Fayette County Public Schools Board of Education, I have found the Partnership to be even more important: the information that is provided on a regular basis is quite helpful, and we have been able to partner with the Partnership on some projects that we feel are quite innovative on behalf of students."

*Kathy Lousignont, Chair  
Fayette County School Board  
Lexington, Kentucky*

"WHEN KENTUCKY'S education professionals need support, expertise, and advocacy, they rely on a proven, yet quiet, partner—the Partnership for Successful Schools. Since 1991, the Partnership has been actively working in our schools by, 1) understanding our education challenges, 2) researching the best methods to solve our problems, and 3) delivering successful programs to improve end results—better educated children. Not only does the Partnership contribute, they document what works to improve our children's ability to learn and to continue learning. This future-oriented approach to delivering tangible results has created national recognition and enthusiastic community support from committed business people who want to build a better educated workforce for tomorrow.

*Susan Mullineaux, President  
Mullineaux Management Services*

"FROM HELPING draft KERA in 1990 through the last 14 years working to implement education reform, I have been in a position to see the difference the Partnership has made. The organization has made a positive difference in leading and sustaining the reforms toward improved teaching and learning in Kentucky. The story would not have been as positive, and we would not be where we are today in Kentucky education, without your involvement."

*Kevin Noland, Associate Commissioner  
Legal and legislative Services  
Kentucky Department of Education*

"DURING THE YEARS of implementation of KERA, the Partnership for Successful Schools has been a vital collaborative partner by providing materials, research, and training. In addition to this, Carolyn Witt Jones has mobilized the many groups that have a stake in the education of all the children in our Commonwealth. This organization has provided insights from the business community and other organizations to the Kentucky Department of Education, the Kentucky General Assembly, and the Executive Branch assuring that education efforts are maximized to help each and every child."

*Gary L. Perkins  
Achievement Gap Coordinator  
Kentucky Department of Education*

"LINKING EDUCATIONAL courses and programs to the real world is critically important in terms of student motivation and aspirations. The Partnership for Successful Schools is making important contributions to Kentucky's P-16 efforts by helping young people, parents, and business and community leaders grasp the relevance of school to the world of work and to young people's future opportunities."

*Keith Bird, Chancellor  
Kentucky Community and Technical College System*

"SINCE ITS INCEPTION in 1991, the Partnership for Successful Schools has been a positive force for educational reform and progress in Kentucky. In alliance with the state's business leaders, the Partnership has increased public understanding of reform and its importance, funded research in education, and created resources to help educators, parents, students, and other community members improve their schools.

The Partnership's vision for Kentucky schools focuses on providing a high-quality education for all students through local accountability, rigorous academic standards, and outstanding teachers. To reach this goal, the Partnership has developed many resources to help educators and others facilitate the continuous improvement of Kentucky schools. KET is pleased to support the Partnership in its ongoing efforts to improve education in every Kentucky school district."

*Kathy Quinn  
Director of Education  
Kentucky Educational Television*

"THE PARTNERSHIP has been a long-time critical friend of Kentucky public education. Its efforts led by Carolyn Jones, are recognized throughout the country for fostering a continuous improvement approach to student performance that has helped more students be prepared for higher education and the workplace. The Partnership's focus on enrolling more students in courses that prepare them for success through Kentucky Scholars, its involvement in the American Diploma Project to make sure those course standards are meaningful, and its results-driven involvement with eight school districts directly are a model for the rest of the nation."

*Drew Scheberle, Interim Executive Director  
Center for State Scholars, Austin, Texas*

"THERE HAS BEEN an ambitious effort in Kentucky. The Partnership has been a central player for years, engaged in policy and community-based local efforts that have made a real difference in work to improve student achievement."

*John Stevens, Executive Director  
Texas Business & Education Coalition, Austin Texas*

"THE PARTNERSHIP for Successful Schools has long enhanced education's key role in developing strong communities to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. With support from elected officials and business leaders, the Partnership provides the kind of educational opportunities that help transform today's school children into tomorrow's leaders."

*Sylvia Lovely, CEO  
Kentucky League of Cities*

"WE CANNOT DO this work without the Partnership for Successful Schools. Its ability to convene in a nonpartisan atmosphere helps ensure greater success than we could drive on our own."

*Linda Pittenger  
Director of Virtual Learning  
Kentucky Department of Education*

"THE PARTNERSHIP for Successful Schools has had an outstanding and long-term effect on the efforts to improve education in Kentucky. Since the Partnership began its work in 1991, it has become a national model for how business leaders can develop, implement, and support systemic reform at the state level.

*Peter Winograd  
Director, Office Education Accountability  
Department of Finance and Administration  
Santa Fe, New Mexico*