

# **REVITALIZING A DYING SCHOOL-BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP**

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(ABSTRACT)

The notion of business involvement in helping to improve public schools is not new. Although business involvement faded somewhat in the 1960s and 1970s, a resurgence in business involvement began in the late seventies and early eighties. School-business partnerships have been steadily on the rise from around 40,000 in 1983 to over 200,000 by the mid-1990's.

When schools and businesses become involved in partnerships certain conditions must be present for the partnerships to succeed. Those conditions include awareness, clear and measurable goals and objectives by both partners, the necessity of identifying potential resources and talent, reciprocal benefits for participants, and the ability to carry out formal evaluation of the program.

The purpose of this study was to attempt to save a school-business partnership that had the potential to make a significant contribution to both a middle school and a large employer in Southside Virginia. By identifying the variables involved in both the erosion and revitalization of a school-business partnership, the information could prove valuable to others who may be struggling to maintain or renew partnerships in their schools or businesses.

This study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved the identification of the variables which contributed to the disintegration of a school-business partnership. The second phase involved using a 12-step partnership development process created by the National Association for Partners in Education to revitalize the partnership. A series of interviews, surveys, and questionnaires, as

well as a search of current school data were used to determine the variables present in both phases.

In phase I of the study, a serious lack of communication, perhaps even miscommunication, appeared to lead to the total shutdown of the partnering process. This breakdown in communication prevented other possibilities for success. The absence of goals or a formal agreement on the nature of the partnership also appeared to be one of its major downfalls.

Phase II of the investigation involved partnership renewal. The major ingredients necessary for partnership development were communication; awareness; reciprocal benefits to participants; mutually acceptable, clear goals and objectives; the ability to carry out formal, on-going evaluation of the partnership; continuous recognition of good works by the stakeholders; and the use of the National Association for Partners in Education 12-step process as both a diagnostic and prescriptive resource for partnering.

School-business partnerships, like all other human endeavors, require understanding, nurturing and support. By attempting to understand and embrace the needs of each partner, the true promise of this very human endeavor may be realized. Developing and revitalizing school-business partnerships is not only possible, but essential if we hope to create the type of learning communities necessary to the total education of children.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the memory of my sister Sylvia Martin and my grandmother Evelyn Mitchell. Their love and inspiration encouraged me to try to make a difference in the lives of others.

I also dedicate this work to my daughter Allison Bancroft Martin, whose curiosity, light, and love sustain me in all my endeavors.

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# CHAPTER 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The notion of business involvement in helping to improve public schools is not new. Business was involved with public schooling for most of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As business became dissatisfied with public school performance, especially in industrialized urban areas, involvement faded during the decades of the 60s and 70s (Barton, 1994; Petracco, 1993; Timpane, 1984).

Gradually, during the late 1970s and early 1980s, business once again started to become involved in public education. This was due in part to a number of factors. The recognition that the rapidly exploding information age was upon us required that business and schools rethink what was necessary to improve schooling in order to prepare students to compete on a global level and sustain a strong national economy. The publication of “A Nation at Risk” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) went a long way in bringing these issues into the realm of public consciousness.

Since the early 1980s school-business partnerships have been steadily on the rise. They have grown from around 40,000 to over 200,000 (Dumaine, 1990; National Association for Partners in Education, 1990). This resurgence has drawn attention to partnerships, but little empirical evidence on these partnerships has been produced thus far. A great deal of the literature consists of testimonials on the effectiveness of partnerships and descriptions of various programs in place.

I became involved in this project as a result of an externship experience with the [city/county name] Chamber of Commerce, which facilitated my involvement in the school-to-work movement in [city name]. This led directly to my interest in the recovery of my school’s floundering school-business partnership. It was through my membership on a number of key School-to-Work Consortium

committees that I began to work with our business partner's legal counsel, Sam, who also was the key contact person for the partnership. In addition, this individual was the chairman of the Action Council, which spearheaded the school-to-work movement in a number of localities in Southside Virginia.

The [city name/county name] area was striving for quite some time to improve its economic and educational image throughout the state and nation. As the local economy had been in a serious state of decline for some years, local industrialists were scrambling to make improvements. Dr. James Hoerner and a team from Virginia Tech were instrumental in facilitating the school-to-work process throughout the region. Many of the senior industry leaders believed that school-to-work might be what local schools needed in order to attract business and industry to the area. Although school-to-work is still in its infancy in [city name], the potential for its continuing evolution may be greatly enhanced by the presence of effective school-business partnerships.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the days just prior to the end of the 1996-1997 school year, I had a very interesting conversation with an executive from our school-business partner, a local textile manufacturer in Southside Virginia. This individual shared with me the concerns that the company had regarding our one-year-old school-business partnership. She felt that the partnership never got off the ground. Whenever, the company made overtures toward progress of some kind, it had been continuously put off by the school administration for one reason or another. Sam, the individual in charge of the partnership was also becoming somewhat frustrated by what she characterized as a selfish mentality held by the principal when it came to various financial requests made by the middle school. She felt that more hands-on involvement would benefit the partnership. Because of those concerns, I was told

that the chances were pretty good that [school name] was about to lose our business-education partnership.

There had been a change of administrators at [school name]. As a result it was deemed necessary to approach the new principal and provide him with a detailed briefing of the partnership problem to discern whether or not he would support a recovery effort or simply opt to dissolve the initiative. I recommended that a meeting be scheduled to determine if this idea was a viable option.

Several days later, I contacted our partner and asked if the company would consider participating in a project to revitalize our dying partnership. As part of our verbal deal, the partner agreed to continue our partnership for the 1997-1998 school year to attempt to improve the partnership.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Part of the intent of this study was to identify what did not happen that should have happened. I wanted to determine the answers to a number of questions. In the first phase I wanted to determine the history of the partnership. What sequence of events led to the point where the business end of the partnership decided to pull out? This would show me what needed to be corrected in order to prevent the loss of the partnership.

In the second phase I wanted to determine the variables associated with the recovery. What would the National Association for Partners in Education 12-step process contribute to the revitalization of this partnership (see Figure 1)?

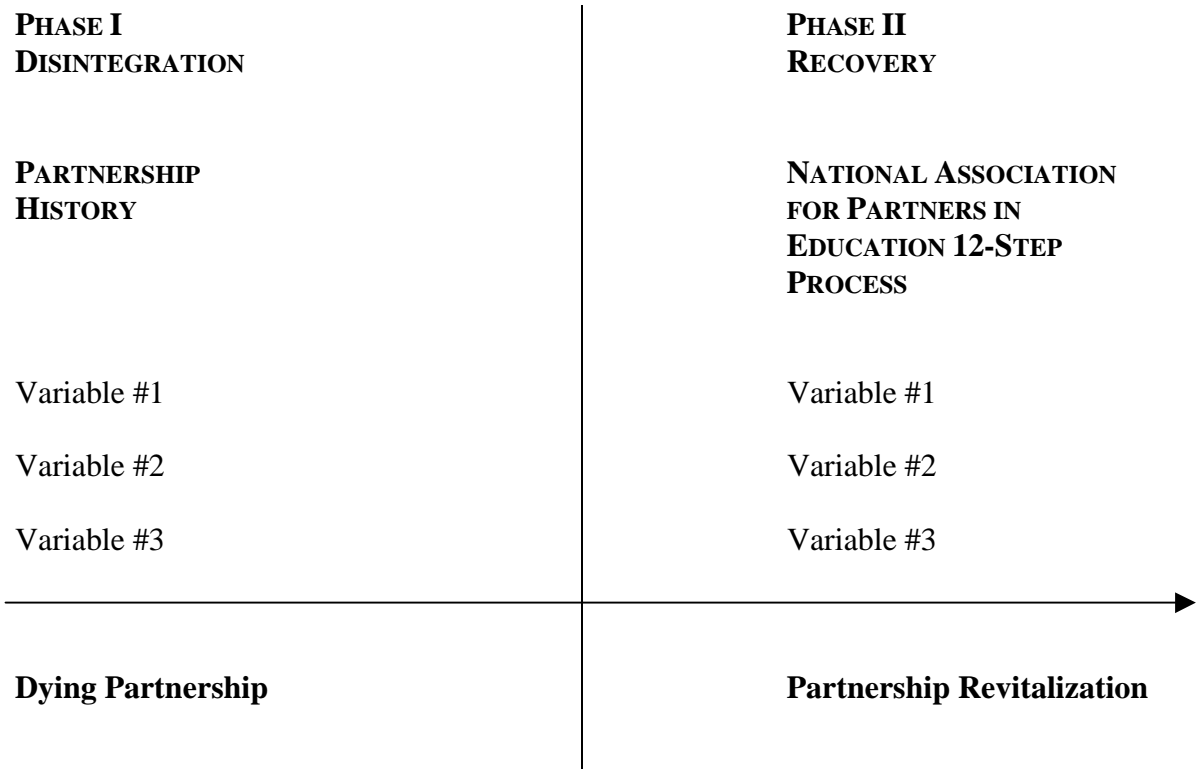


Figure 1. Representation of Phase I and Phase II of the investigation.

## **Research Questions**

The focus of this study was to determine how to revitalize a dying school-business partnership. As a result of this study, I wanted to answer the following questions:

1. What factors contributed to the disintegration of the partnership?
2. What factors must be present to revive and revitalize a dying partnership?

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to attempt to save a school-business partnership that had the potential to make a significant contribution to both a middle school and a large employer in Southside Virginia. If through the course of the study I could identify the variables involved in both eroding and revitalizing a school-business partnership, the information could prove valuable to others who may be struggling to maintain or renew partnerships in their schools or businesses.

This study has the potential to help groups already engaged in partnerships improve existing conditions within those partnerships. To borrow a term from business, the *bottom line* is that our children will be the greatest benefactors of our efforts. It is imperative that we as members of a community recognize and utilize the resources available within our own communities for the benefit of children (Dewey, 1938).

A significant barrier to school-business partnership understanding and success is the paucity of empirical data on this subject (Cobb & Quaglia, 1994; Kane & Boverie, 1995; Wise, 1981). The attitude of opportunism that is sometimes exhibited by one or both partners in the early implementation phase is also viewed as a significant barrier (Tushnet, 1993). It is expected that this study will contribute to the development of healthy partnerships by identifying factors related to their decline and processes related to their revitalization.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Because the investigation is qualitative in nature and very specific to a set of localized circumstances, generalization of the findings should be done with due care. Each partnership is unique, and, as such, individual circumstances must be considered carefully prior to the application of the findings of this study.

### **Organization of the Study**

In Chapter 1 of this study the reasons and aspects behind this investigation are described in such topics as the problem statement, research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, limitations, and organization of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature. In Chapter 3 methodology is discussed. In Chapter 4 the history and revitalization are documented. Chapter 5 contains the results, discussion, and conclusions of the study. In addition, recommendations for practice and further studies are addressed.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

My review of the literature concerning school-business partnerships found a considerable lack of hard empirical data. There are however, a limited number of what appear to be benchmark studies which begin to address important issues in this field of study (Hillage,1995; Knight,1995). The organization of this review includes information on business involvement, school involvement, partnership advantages, partnership evaluation, types of partnerships, partnerships in action, and developing effective partnerships. Unfortunately, I found no literature concerning dying and recovering partnerships.

#### **Business Involvement**

Businesses become involved in school partnerships for many reasons. Hillage & Others (1995) examined British employers' perceptions of school-business partnerships. Information was obtained from a survey mailed to 1,796 businesses randomly drawn from the Dunn and Bradstreet database. Responses were received from 47.1%. Follow up interviews were conducted; 43 face-to-face and 38 via the telephone. Businesses became involved in school partnerships for a wide range of reasons. These reasons fell into three fairly broad categories: narrow self-interest, general or enlightened self-interest, and benevolent interest.

Although most employers in the survey identify their motives for involvement to be mostly altruistic, such as influencing young people's attitudes toward work and career options, other reasons tended to be self-interested aims and objectives such as building good recruitment networks or marketing strategies.

Employers gave the following reasons for getting involved in partnerships:

- Staff development- leadership, presentation, and mentoring skills.

- Marketing as an underlying motive-presenting a positive image of products or services.
- Improving the image of the sector-presenting a positive image of the business.
- Influencing education-young peoples attitudes and understanding of the world of work (Hillage, pp. 16-20).

The respondents reported the most valuable activities they were involved with in schools are:

- Work experience-providing students on-site experience in the business environment.
- Career events-broad based examples of careers in both the public and private sectors using such vehicles as career fairs.
- School visits-students visiting the company during operating hours.
- Curriculum projects-joint projects where the school and the business attempt to align the objectives of each in order to produce a relevant learning experience.
- Mock interviews-providing students with experience with the job interview process.
- Teacher placements-providing teachers with workplace experience which can then be used as part of teaching strategies.
- Work shadowing-allowing students or teachers to be a part of an employee's day by following and observing the daily work routine.
- Mentoring-providing employee role-models to work with students in the schools.
- Employer placements-allowing employees to spend time in the public schools observing and learning. (Hillage, p. 28)

Many businesses do not formally assess their partnerships with education (Cobb & Quaglia, 1994). This was true in more than 80% of the partnerships studied by (Hillage, 1995).

Hillage (1995) found that nearly two-thirds of businesses in their study had not formed partnerships with schools. The key reasons employers in the British study gave for not being involved in school-business partnerships:



- Did not have the time
- Could not see the value
- Lacked awareness (p. 63)

Business people believed the number one way to increase their involvement would be to provide more information and better explanations of the benefits resulting from becoming involved. The authors concluded,

...it would seem that the development of clear success indicators and simple evaluation techniques to help employers see the effectiveness of their involvement would be useful. Such a development would also help with the general promotion of employer involvement in education business links by providing the material for a clear exposition of the benefits to employers. (p. 11)

There are many benefits for businesses that engage in partnerships with education (Knight, 1995). Knight cited the benefits to business as perceived by school principals fall in the areas of human resource development, labor, access to resources, financial benefits, social benefits, public relations, and benefits in advertising and marketing. This study helped me to understand that if the business partner was to remain committed to the partnership, then a set of goals would have to be developed that demonstrated the notion of mutual benefits and measurable results.

### **School Involvement**

Schools become involved in partnerships for a wide range of reasons (Knight, 1995). For partnerships to be successful they must provide benefits to as many of the participants as possible. Both sides must have incentives to motivate participation as well as a clear set of demonstrable benefits to both institutions (Barnard, 1938; Blau, 1964, 1983). School-business partnerships by and large tend to benefit one major group, schools (Cobb & Quaglia, 1994).

Knight (1995) conducted a survey of school jurisdictions and schools in Alberta, Canada, to determine the current state of school-business partnerships. Seventy-two jurisdictions received the school-business partnership survey form. Responses were received from 93%. A random sample of 1,376 schools out of a total of 1,800 was sent a copy of the school-business survey form, with the return being 43%. Thirty-eight percent of schools had partnerships. That this is close to the same level of participation by businesses in the earlier cited British study (nearly 1/3) (Hillage, 1995).

Schools have multiple goals for becoming involved in partnerships. Knight (1995) shared the top five goals in order of importance to the schools: (1) promoting strong channels of communication, (2) influencing students to continue their training or education, (3) sharing workplace expectations, (4) providing more opportunities for career preparation, and enhancing career information for students.

A comparison of perceptions of school and business people regarding the success of partnerships seems to differ. Schools in this study believed that their partnerships are very effective. Knight (1995), found 96% of schools involved in his study judged them to be successful or very successful. Less than 20% of businesses in the British study (Hillage, 1995) characterized their partnerships as having high levels of success. Knight (1995), however, inferred, "...there is a need for some partnerships to have goals and a clear mandate so that the participants have explicit expectations by which they can assess their performance" (p. 9).

Listed in the 1995 Alberta (Knight, 1995) study, as "being synthesized from many comments", were the criteria for success cited by educators:

- Frequency of participation
- Perception of success of specific activities
- Visible evidence of success as measured against the goals that had been established for a particular partnership
- Enthusiasm displayed by the partner about the relationship in general

- Flexibility of the partner to adapt to emerging needs
- Communication skills of the participants
- Positive relationships that were established between the partners
- Responsiveness to requests made by the school
- Endurance or continuation of the partnership over several years
- Perceived benefits to the school. (pp. 9-10)

Partnerships are faced with numerous challenges. Knight (1995) identified challenges faced by partnerships to be in the areas of goal development, time factors, roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Knight also found that nurturing relationships and communication were seen to be challenges faced by such partnerships. In addition, factors such as activities partnerships engaged in and the process of change were also listed as potential challenges. There are wide ranging benefits for schools that participate in partnerships (Cobb & Quaglia, 1994; Kane & Boverie, 1995; Petracco, 1993; Tushnet, 1993). School-business partnerships exist for many reasons and strive to accomplish a number of goals which have the potential to benefit many stakeholders. These goals should include an approach to partnering that provides awareness of the needs and resources of each partner, reciprocal benefits, clear goals and objectives, and an effective means for evaluating the process.

### **Partnership Advantages**

According to NAPE (National Association for Partners in Education, 1990), Well constructed partnerships between schools and businesses are a good response to concerns Americans feel about education. In a complex and interrelated world, it is becoming clear that energy and resources from the wider community are needed if schools are to succeed in educating all youngsters. (p. 7)

Many advantages are believed to come with effective school-business partnerships. One of the main advantages is economic in nature. As we move

toward the new century, it is believed that our children must be able to compete in the global marketplace and have the ability to be intelligent consumers. According to former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (1992),

As corporations of all nations are transformed into global webs, the important question from the standpoint of national wealth is not which nation's citizens own what, but which nation's citizens learn to do what, so they are capable of adding more value to the world economy and therefore increasing their own potential worth. (p. 137)

Partnerships are viewed as having the potential to achieve such goals. Collaborative partnerships can provide a better understanding of the world of work for every child (Goodlad, 1984). In addition, some school-based roles for business and industry include in-service opportunities for teachers, curriculum development, guest speakers, industry tours, and helping with equipment and supplies (Hoerner, 1995). Partnerships are also important elements in the overall process of community building. According to Timpane and Reich (1997), partnerships, one form of community development,

...place a premium on building healthy communities, on preparing children for adulthood, on learning in context, on active participation in the learning process, and on providing a broad spectrum of learning opportunities to the entire community. (p. 467)

Through continual improvement, communities are seen to be good places to live. Businesses understand the importance of helping to nurture their communities through working with education toward these ends (Timpane, 1984; Wise, 1981).

Partnerships are believed to hold the promise of benefits to many involved in the process. Schools can benefit by forging closer ties with the business community. This fosters a greater understanding of workplace expectations. Business can benefit by helping to create a better educated workforce. Educators

and industrialists need each other, for the success of each is dependent on the quality of the other (Boyer, 1983; Wise, 1981).

Partnerships are excellent avenues for exposing children to successful role models in the community (Dansberger & Usdan, 1984; Franchine, 1982; Petracco, 1993). Partnership interaction can also facilitate the understanding of what businesses expect from graduates entering the workplace and how that relates to achievement in school (Stansky, 1996; Wingate, 1983). This understanding can serve to help create connections which in turn bridge the gaps between industry and education and create a sense of cohesion and interaction among the participants (Mulkey, 1995). These connections can aid in developing a deeper understanding of our free-market system among teachers and students and may even serve to heighten the morale of business participants (Gray, 1984; Whiteford, 1994).

### **Partnership Evaluation**

Also identified in the literature are elements which are believed to be necessary for the success of the partnership. The development of awareness and clear measurable goals and objectives by both partners (Boyer, 1983; Gray, 1984; Mulkey, 1995; National Association for Partners in Education, 1990; Stead & Eyring, 1994) is seen as a vital component in the process. Another point emphasized the necessity of identifying potential resources and talent in order to get the program started (Bassinger, 1994; National Association for Partners in Education, 1990).

Another area of importance is that of reciprocal benefits. There must be mutual benefits and working to meet stakeholder needs (Barnard, 1938; Bassinger, 1994; Blau, 1964 and 1983) if the partnership is to remain a viable enterprise. Another necessary element in determining the viability of the partnership will be

dependent on its ability to carry-out formal evaluation of the program (Blake & Pfeifer, 1993; Gray, 1984; Schwartz, 1990) which facilitates the identification of strengths and areas in need of improvement which may serve to foster continuing support for the endeavor. These important factors were all found to be seriously lacking between the investigator's middle-school and the business partner in this study.

### **Types of Partnerships**

According to the National Association for Partners in Education, school-business partnerships can take on numerous levels and forms. The following are examples of those levels and forms:

*Master Partners* help to develop a partnership plan to meet school goals.

*Tutor/Mentor Partners* reinforce instruction, motivate and guide students, provide role models and instill confidence in young people.

*Co-Op Partners* provide practical on-the-job experience for students, which serves as an extension of their instructional program.

*Resource Partners* donate equipment, supplies, materials, technical assistance, facilities, or financial assistance to schools, staff, and students.

*Volunteer Program Partners* assist school staff and provide direct assistance to students in specific curriculum areas, allowing students to have more individual attention and enrichment.

*Speakers Bureau Partners* share career information, areas of expertise, special skills, or talents. They visit classrooms a number of times during the school year for this purpose.

*Internship Partners* provide opportunities for teachers and/or students to spend a period of time during business hours observing and learning about "real world" situations.

The investigator and the business representative in this study built a combination of master, resource, and internship approaches to partnering. How this occurred will be discussed further in a later chapter.

### **Partnerships In Action**

In January of 1998, a School-Business Partnership Breakfast and Symposium was held at the local high school and sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce to educate potential business partners on the benefits of becoming involved in school business partnerships. Presenters, Bell and Rogers, members of the chamber's education committee, supplied numerous examples of partnerships in action:

*My Beautiful World.* A one-hour photo service provides disposable cameras to third grade students. The students take pictures and write about the pictures in their journals. Writing skills, vocabulary, and cooperative learning are enhanced through this program. Photo shop employees teach students proper use in maintenance of cameras, creative photography, and other topics. Kodak helps underwrite this project.

*Good Hands with Allstate.* Allstate insurance employees adopt one elementary school each year and provide school supplies for impoverished children. Volunteers serve as tutors, mentors, and computer assistants. The company donates computers to the school and sponsors junior achievement activities for the students.

*B&D Comic Books.* For almost ten years, this small business has rewarded hundreds of students each grading period for improved grades or attendance. They receive a free comic book from a school-approved list.

*Lunch Buddies.* One popular restaurant provides free meal incentives to children for achievement and improvement. At the end of each grading period, one student and the principal are treated to lunch.

*Weather School.* A local television station has launched a project for students in the viewing area and provides free computer software and weather tools. The weather school tests students' knowledge of weather and weather-related facts each night on the evening news.

*Prom Time Revisited.* Employees of a small retail chain routinely partner with high school students to design and raise funds for their proms. Employees work on "theme teams," supply ideas and materials for props, and help with refreshments and clean-up. Some enthusiastic employees attend the proms.

*Fun Fridays.* One recreation department recently initiated a program designed to combat the challenges that face adolescents. Fun Fridays offer supervised recreational opportunities to teens and provides appropriate, safe and fun activities such as snorkeling, rock climbing, caving, horseback riding, and field trips.

*Pollution Solution.* One non-profit organization geared toward ecology and environmental protection routinely visits schools in its service area and provides programs on recycling, pollution, and litter prevention.

*Science in a Sack.* An enrichment program, Science in a Sack consists of about a dozen science experiments designed for students in grades kindergarten through five. Employees at one technology-related company assemble the sacks using abandoned lunch boxes and other unique containers filled with magnets and other supplies. An index card provides instructions for simple experiments children can do at home. Students check out a sack, take it home to complete the experiment, and return it to school to trade for another. Employees visit the



classroom at least once per grading period to review experiments, restock supplies, and obtain suggestions for additional sacks.

These examples helped to illustrate to the investigator the many types of ideas that exist for use in partnerships. The experience also helped the investigator to understand the possibilities for adapting these to fit individual partnerships.

### **Center for Applied Technology and Career Exploration**

In November 1997, I had heard of the Center for Applied Technology and Career Exploration (CATCE) in Rocky Mount, Virginia. This center relied on partnerships with industry as a main strategy for reaching educational goals. Center Director Jay Strickler said that students are exposed to seven modules in the Center. Students may take three modules during the period of one semester. They may take courses in (1) environmental natural resources, (2) arts, (3) manufacturing, (4) engineering and architectural design, (5) media design, (6) finance, and (7) health and human services. Students or interns, as they are called, attend one module for a six-week period. The classrooms and schedules are designed to immerse the interns in a setting similar to the actual workplace. The days are not divided into class periods.

I asked the superintendent of Franklin County, Len Gereau, about the partnering process between CATCE and businesses. Gereau said that CATCE currently has almost 150 partnerships with local and national businesses and industries. These run the gamut from resource partners to expert instructors provided by some of the businesses.

### **Summary**

Under the right circumstances, school-business partnerships may provide multiple, reciprocal benefits to numerous stakeholders. Foremost among these is

the potential to nurture a strong workforce and knowledgeable consumers. This has positive implications locally, nationally, and internationally. A growing number of people in the United States are of the opinion that in order to compete in a global economy our workforce must be adept problem-solvers, decision makers, negotiators, and thinkers. Routine and predictability will no longer be the benchmarks as we move into the new century. These challenges will require a willingness to change. According to (Fullan, 1991), “Serious reform, as we have seen, is not implementing single innovations. It is changing the culture and structure of the school” (p. 169).

Citizens will be required to function in very fluid and dynamic environments in both society and the workplace (Dutton, 1995; Goldberger & Kazis, 1996; Magaziner & Clinton, 1992; O’Neil, 1992; Packert, 1996; Reich, 1992; Slavin, 1996; VanSciver, 1997). School-business partnerships are seen by many to hold promise in addressing these realities. As industry and education continue the struggle to survive and improve in our locality, the need for cooperation between these entities is obvious if we hope to correct the local decline in both arenas. According to (Katz & Kahn, 1978), “Social Organizations must draw renewed supplies of energy from other institutions, or people, or the material environment. No social structure is self-sufficient or self contained” (p. 23).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The cornerstones of the Virginia Tech School Leaders Program (SLP) were leadership, inquiry, and change. SLP experiences revolved around the notion of qualitative action research as a means of effecting positive change. It is in this spirit that I address my methods for carrying out this study.

This study lends itself well to an *action research* approach. The school-business partnership at my school had been failing for quite some time. I wanted to find out why and what could be done to correct the problem. According to Calhoun (1994),

...action research is a fancy way of saying, lets study what's happening at our school, decide if we can make it a better place by changing what and how we teach and how we relate to students and the community; study the effects; and begin again. (p. 1)

In addition to utilizing qualitative action research, Sam and I decided the intervention in this study would involve using elements of the National Association for Partners in Education 12-step partnership development process as a resource for assisting in the recovery of the school-business partnership (see Figure 2). This process is used for developing partnerships and after reviewing the material, it seemed to make sense to both Sam and myself, that it might serve as a useful tool for a partnership that was obviously floundering.

**PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

1. Awareness
2. Assessing needs
3. Identifying potential resources
4. Establishing goals and objectives
5. Designing the program
6. Managing the partnership

**Program Implementation**

7. Recruitment
8. Assignment
9. Orientation
10. Training
11. Retention and recognition
12. Monitoring and evaluation

Figure 2. The National Association for Partners in Education 12-step partnership development process. From National Association for Partners in Education, 1990, p. 12

## **School Profile**

The school is located in Southside Virginia in what is predominately a textile and manufacturing community of roughly 17,000 people. The school enrollment in 1997 was just over 700 students in grades six, seven, and eight. Forty-nine percent were males and fifty-one percent were females. The range of student ages was 11-15 years (Bulldog handbook, 1997).

All classes maintained coeducational participation during instruction with the exception of Family Life. Homerooms averaged 49% males and 51% females. The ethnic composition was 43% white, 57% black, and there were three students of a different nationality (Columbia System for School Reports, 1997).

Approximately 50% of the parents worked as laborers in either the furniture or textile industries. Eleven percent are employed in the field of education. Employment in professional areas made up 27%, while the remaining 12% were unemployed (Emergency Care Forms, 1997).

Free or reduced-price lunch is available to students who qualify through application. All applications received are examined to determine eligibility. Approximately fifty percent of the students participated in this program (Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Forms, 1997).

An average of 49% of the students live in the traditional two-parent family. However, a majority (51%) live in non-traditional homes. While 37% live with only one parent, the remaining 14% live in other family structures involving step-parents, grandparents, or other relatives and guardians (Columbia System for School Reports, 1997).

In looking at standardized achievement scores from the Virginia State Assessment Program, students consistently scored at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in all areas. Achievement in language arts appeared to be a particular strength for the school (see Table 1).

**Table 1**1994, 1995, 1996 Iowa Test of Basic Skills Performance Profile Based on National Percentile

<b>TEST</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>
Vocabulary	50	48	42
Reading comprehension	56	63	55
Spelling	61	58	56
Capitalization	60	65	58
Punctuation	77	78	72
Usage & expression	63	64	60
Total language	66	67	64
Visual materials	54	55	48
Reference materials	60	64	60
Total work study	59	61	55
Math concepts	55	60	46
Math problem solving	49	50	40
Math computation	39	40	18
Total mathematics	49	53	38
Complete composite	60	60	52
Social studies	50	57	54
Science	62	62	58

Note. From Virginia State Assessment Program data provided by the school's principal.

All teachers at the middle school were certified by the State Department of Education. Sixty percent of the 63 faculty and staff held masters degrees. Eight teachers were pursuing masters degrees while two others were pursuing doctoral degrees.

The middle school recently completed a 7.2 million dollar building renovation and technology upgrade. There are state-of-the-art computer labs for each grade level and computers in every classroom. The media center has multiple computer terminals and a Raulands Ranger System which can be operated by telephones in each classroom. This system delivers a variety of multimedia options which can be seen on television monitors in every classroom.

### **The Business Profile**

The middle school's business partner was a local manufacturer of fleece and jersey apparel. Founded in 1986, the company operated approximately 14 facilities in North Carolina, Virginia, California, and Wisconsin. The company employed approximately 2,300 persons. The business manufactured t-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts, and pants to sell to entertainment, retail, and branded customers as well as wholesale distributors worldwide. The company's stock was publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

The company's management believed in supporting community efforts where their facilities were located, including support of education. Management members sat on local boards, company products were often donated to selected charities, and employees participated in a variety of community programs.

## **Intervention:**

### **Application of the National Association for Partners in Education**

#### **12-Step Process**

The NAPE steps that were used for this study include: awareness, needs assessment, potential resources, goals and objectives, program design, partnership management, retention and recognition, and monitoring and evaluation. How these steps were used is described in chapter four of this investigation.

#### **Awareness**

Awareness is informing key populations within the schools and the community that a partnership is being considered as means of improving the schools and the quality of life in the community. Awareness involves aspects of networking, marketing, selling, brainstorming, and public relations.

#### **Needs Assessment**

Needs assessment is the process of gathering and interpreting information regarding school and business needs that will determine the goals and objectives of the partnership. Needs assessment is on-going because school and business needs change over time.

#### **Potential Resources**

Involves identifying all of the people, materials, equipment, and funds available within the school, school district, and business to help meet the needs that have been identified.



## **Goals and Objectives**

A goal is a broad statement of purpose for the partnership. It is similar to a mission statement in that it provides broad parameters for the partnership and is generally as much a statement of what the partnership will not do as of what the partnership will do.

An objective is a statement of intent for an aspect of the partnership, and is measurable, specific and determines the focus of evaluation. Objectives are the intended outcomes for the partnership. These outcomes help the partners to measure their successes and determine their weaknesses. If the objectives are clear, then the partnership's efforts are measurable.

## **Program Design**

The program design is dependent upon the priorities of the school and the business as well as the specific goals and objectives of the partnership. Program design is the process of determining which options of a partnership are most likely to work effectively for the partnership.

## **Partnership Management**

Partnership management is the process of designing the major activities the partnership will undertake, the plan for the partnership itself, and how the partnership will be managed. It is the rules and regulations under which the partnership will function.

## **Recruitment**

Recruitment is the process of finding people and resources for your partnership to serve the needs identified by the school and the business. It involves the promotion of the partnership.

### **Assignment**

Assignment is the process of matching people with the jobs the partnership wants done. It is also the process of matching fiscal and material resources to identified needs of the partnership.

### **Orientation**

Orientation is the process that prepares people for involvement in a new situation. Orientation should acquaint all the participants with the nature of the undertaking and help them understand their roles in it.

### **Training**

Training is the process of preparing people or groups of people to perform specific tasks in predetermined situations. Training helps the people involved in the partnership be as effective as possible in their specific roles. The purpose of the training must be clear to all the participants.

### **Retention and Recognition**

Retention is the process of keeping partners involved. The decision to remain in the partnership is directly related to the reciprocal benefits of all participants from the business and the school.

Recognition is a major strategy involved in retention of partnerships. It should be planned and on-going throughout the duration of the partnership. This would involve media coverage, letters of appreciation, and activities in the community, the work-site and the school which serve to strengthen the partnership.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation involves collecting and interpreting data in order to make decisions regarding the direction of the partnership. Measurable objectives established early in the partnership will determine the type of data to be collected. On-going monitoring and evaluation will complement the evolution of the partnership and provide a clear picture of the progress and direction of the initiative.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

I collected data from a number of sources for this project. Interviews were conducted with the former principal, the business representative, and the current principal. A faculty questionnaire was developed and completed by teachers at the middle school. The National Association for Partners in Education 12-step partnership development process was used as a resource for this investigation. For an explanation of how and which steps were used in this process see Table 2. An explanation of why some of the NAPE steps were omitted is included in the findings of the investigation in chapter four. The following is a description of how phases one and two were carried-out.

## **Phase I**

Interviews were conducted to obtain data for this project. In addition, data were collected through the use of a faculty questionnaire. Interviews with the business representative, former principal, and current principal were audio-taped with the prior approval of the participants. The interviews were conducted to determine the variables that contributed to the disintegration of the partnership.

**Table 2**

Data Collection Procedures

Source of data	Action(s)	Product(s)
Business contact person & former principal	<p><b>Interviews</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When did the partnership start?</li> <li>2. Who initiated contact?</li> <li>3. Was a formal agreement drawn up?</li> <li>4. How many were involved?</li> <li>5. What activities did the partnership plan?</li> <li>6. Was the local chamber of commerce involved?</li> <li>7. Why do you think the partnership didn't work out?</li> <li>8. Are there any others I should talk with who can help me understand what happened?</li> <li>9. Was anyone appointed as a contact person?</li> <li>10. Do you know of any documents I should look at to help me understand?</li> </ol>	Information on the history of the partnership Variables that may have led to the disintegration of the partnership.
New principal	<p><b>Interview</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you believe is the current status of our partnership?</li> <li>2. What can this partnership do to support your work?</li> <li>3. How well do you think the partnership is working and why?</li> <li>4. What important contributions do you see this partnership providing for children at this school?</li> </ol>	Information on the current status of the partnership as well as a benchmark for understanding the perspective of the new principal with regard to the partnership.
Faculty	<p><b>Questionnaire</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you believe is the current status of our partnership?</li> <li>2. What can this partnership do to support your work in the classroom?</li> <li>3. How well do you think the partnership is working and why?</li> <li>4. What important contributions do you see this partnership providing for children at this school?</li> <li>5. Would you be willing to serve on a partnership steering committee?</li> </ol>	Information on the history of the partnership as well as its current status from a faculty perspective and to identify potential options for the future direction of the initiative.

Table 2 (continued)  
Data collection procedures

Source of Data	Action	Product
Business	<p><b>NAPE steps 1&amp; 2 Questionnaire</b></p> <p>1. What is the mission of your organization?            2. What types of workers do you employ?            3. What type of human resource projects do you think would be mutually beneficial to the business and the middle school?            4. How would your employees be able to volunteer?            5. Does the middle school have any resources which you would like them to share with you?</p>	<p>Awareness by the faculty that a partnership existed and input from the faculty in determining the direction the partnership should take.</p> <p>Awareness of the resources, needs and goals of the business partner for determining the direction of the initiative.</p>
School & business representatives	<p><b>NAPE step 3 Potential Resources</b></p> <p>Brainstorm Session</p>	Identified resources within the school and the business which would be of reciprocal benefit to the partnership.
School & business representatives	<p><b>NAPE step 4 Goals and Objectives</b></p> <p>Established clear goals and objectives            Discussion and Consensus            Review of Questionnaire</p>	Determined what program of action the partnership intended to follow and how it would accomplish those endeavors.
School & business representatives	<p><b>NAPE step 5 Program Design</b></p> <p>Identified options which best fit needs, goals and objectives            Defined activities</p>	Determined how the partnership worked.
School & business representatives	<p><b>NAPE step 6</b></p> <p>Developed role descriptions            Developed procedures for administering the partnership            Developed procedures for monitoring the partnership.</p>	Determined how the partnership would function and be managed.

Table 2 (continued)  
Data collection procedures

Source of Data	Action	Product
School & business representatives	<p><b>NAPE step 11</b>  <b>Retention and Recognition</b>            Jointly develop retention and recognition activities for the partnership</p>	Participants are recognized for contributions to the partnership and encouraged to remain active in the partnership.
School & business representatives	<p><b>NAPE step 12</b>  <b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>            Jointly determine the types of process and outcome data to collect</p> <p>Jointly determine methods and instruments to collect data</p> <p>Jointly organize the monitoring and evaluation process</p> <p>Jointly determine how to use evaluation results for purposes of decision-making</p>	<p>Both a formative and summative means for evaluating the progress and direction the partnership will undertake</p> <p>Determined the factors that must be present to vitalize a dying partnership</p>
School and business representatives	<p><b>Final Year-end Evaluation</b>            Reviewed performance on goals and objectives of program</p>	Determined that goals and objectives had been accomplished
School and business representatives	<p><b>Letter of Intent</b>            Renew partnership for 1998-99</p>	Formal contract signing, fall 1998

Each participant received a transcribed manuscript of their interview. Each participant reviewed the copy for accuracy and agreed to have it included in this study. The faculty questionnaire was distributed during the partnership awareness breakfast. I informed the faculty that the questionnaire was voluntary. All sixty-three questionnaires were returned at the conclusion of the awareness breakfast.

The business questionnaire was given to Sam for distribution to the business partner committee members. Sam agreed to have the committee voluntarily complete the questionnaire and return it to me. Unfortunately, this was never accomplished for reasons that were never made clear to me.

### **Treatment of the Data**

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, I started to analyze the data. I wanted to determine if consistent variables were present throughout the interviews. After reviewing each transcript no fewer than a dozen times, I began listing small groups of similar words or ideas found in each transcript on three by five cards. I then looked back at the literature to determine what problems were present. Communication, for example, is necessary for partnerships to succeed. If I saw data indicating that factor was not present, it was grouped under the heading, "Lack of Communication."

The headings were written on the dry-erase board in my classroom. I placed transparent tape on the back of each three by five card and then placed each under what I thought would be the appropriate heading. The same procedure was used for the faculty questionnaire data. I then created a raw data matrix of variables contributing to the disintegration of the partnership. Table five is found in chapter four of this study.

## Phase II

Data sources for phase two included questionnaire responses by the faculty to questions one, two, three, and five. The same method of analysis described in phase-one was employed for phase-two. The questions were asked again in the spring of 1998 to determine changes in faculty perception regarding the partnership.

In order to compare the data from the fall of 1997 and the spring of 1998, responses to those questionnaires were grouped into positive, negative, and neutral categories. This was done to compare the responses and determine if improvement in faculty perceptions had indeed occurred.

Identifying potential resources within the school and business, NAPE step three, involved Sam and myself brainstorming lists. I listed possible resources from the school and Sam listed possible resources from the business. We then shared our lists. I showed the lists to the principal and Sam indicated she would show the lists to her committee. Which resources were used and why is explained in chapter four.

Determining goals and objectives, NAPE steps four and five, were accomplished by brainstorming ideas on the dry-erase board in my classroom. We came up with the final list by mutually agreeing to identify those listed that were realistic and attainable within the school year.

Sam and I reviewed the role descriptions for NAPE step six in the handbook. We then sat down and wrote out what we felt would be our roles in the partnership for the first year. We decided at this time that we would jointly administer the partnership and serve as contact people for the school and the business. We monitored the first year of the partnership by choosing goals we felt were reasonable and measurable to gauge success. Those goals are explained in chapter four of this work.



Retention and recognition, NAPE step eleven, was accomplished through individually seeking out ways to recognize the good works of each partner. I nominated the business partner for an award from the local chamber of commerce. Sam recognized the faculty and staff during Education Week. In addition, the local VEA chapter cited the business partner with a “Whole Village” award for their work with the middle school. Finally, the business partner was recognized at the end-of-year assembly for their contributions to the middle-school.

Monitoring and evaluation, NAPE step twelve, involved measuring each of the partnership goals according to the outcomes achieved. We chose goals we that we were confident would succeed in order to get the partnership off to a good start. The final evaluation involved sitting down with Sam and the principal and reviewing our goals, objectives, and final outcomes for the partnership. Through this review, we determined that the outcomes had been achieved. As a result, Sam and the new principal agreed to sign the letter of intent to renew the partnership for the 1998-1999 school-year.

### **Confidentiality**

This study is presented in a way which respects the personal privacy of the participants involved in this process. Real names were not used. In addition, the investigator did not divulge the identity of the middle school or the business partner.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a description of the school, the business, and methods used to obtain data for this project. I explained how I collected the data and how it was analyzed. In addition, the National Association for Partners in Education partnership development process was explained. The

steps involved in this project and how they were used was also discussed. Finally, aspects of confidentiality related to this study were addressed.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

Data for this study were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and anecdotal conversations. I tell the story in two phases: the disintegration of the partnership (Phase I) and the results of the treatment for renewal of the partnership (Phase II).

#### **Phase I: Partnership Disintegration**

##### **Introduction to Phase I**

The contents of phase I of this investigation includes the perspectives of the former principal, the current principal, the business partner, and the middle school faculty. Also included is my interpretation of events and the variables that contributed to the disintegration of the partnership. As I attempted to learn more about the history of the partnership, I ran into many dead ends. The initial plan was to attempt to locate any and all documents that could shed light on the beginnings of this partnership. I assumed that a wealth of school files must surely exist that could provide data for this investigation. In late August 1997, I began to inquire about the existence of documents such as lists of proposed activities, expenditures, memos, letters, phone messages, meeting minutes, or faxes exchanged. In each case, I was referred to someone else who might know of the existence of such data sources. I spoke first with the school secretary. I asked her if documents existed on our partnership that I might review, as I was currently working on a project to revitalize the initiative. She said that she personally knew of none, but the principal's secretary would certainly know where they were.

I next approached the principal's secretary on the afternoon of August 26, 1997. I asked Mrs. B. if there were any partnership documents on file. Her response surprised me, "Not that I am aware of. Besides, they didn't do anything." She then told me to check with the principal to see if any files on the partnership were in his office. I checked with the principal. He stated that he had seen no such files anywhere in his office. He then directed me back to his secretary Mrs. B., saying that she would certainly have them. It was at this point that I decided to contact the former principal to see if she could provide any clues for my investigative paper chase.

A few days later, I was able to get in touch by telephone with our former principal. I asked her if she knew of or had any documents that related in any way to our school-business partnership. She stated, "I have no idea. There may be some in a box somewhere. But, I couldn't put my finger on them. You might try asking (business contact) at (business). I know she had some lists of things that they wanted to do. How is your topic coming along?" I responded, "Well it could be better if I could get hold of any information on the partnership." The former principal stated, "It really wasn't very good. They never followed through with anything." I then asked her if she would agree to allow me to interview her concerning the partnership. She agreed.

### **Former Principal's Perspective**

The interview with the former principal was conducted in mid-September 1997. I learned that the school business partnership did not begin until November of 1996. The former principal said,

We were the only school in the system that didn't have a partner, so I was searching for one. Sort of word of mouth. I heard that P. did not have a partner. I saw S. one day and knew she worked there. I had had her son in elementary school a few years earlier, and so I am sure I must have initiated

talking about it. S. went back and talked with the higher ups, and at first, they weren't interested. I wonder if her memory will be the same as mine. It took us another good month to really nail it down, if they were going to help us.

I then asked, "Was a formal agreement or contract drawn up?" The former principal responded, "No, I don't think, but it probably should have been." I asked, "How many people were involved altogether?" She replied,

Just the two of us. We never got anybody else together. I suppose it would be good to have a committee and all, but I don't think we really ever established a partnership. All during ...last year we were in the formation stage. I don't think we ever formed a partnership, I don't believe. I really didn't have the feeling that P. really wanted to do it. S. wanted to do it. She was very committed to it. But the number of things we asked them to do, they turned us down and they kept turning us down. So my feeling was that there wasn't any kind of commitment at the highest level for the partnership, is my opinion.

I asked, "What were some of the things they turned us down for?" Her reply was,

Oh, well let's see. I can't remember. I can't remember, but there were several. We asked them to contribute to our scholarship fund for needy children. We were going to our booster club because some students needed money to go on our DC trip [Washington, DC], and they suggested asking the partnership for help. I wrote a letter directly to the CEO asking for \$5,000 and never heard anything back. I called S.; she said she would check, but I never heard anything back. They never would give us anything monetary. They gave us some sweatshirts at the beginning of the year, and then they helped with the field day, although that was very limited in help. They sent two or three people, and when we had [previous partner] several years ago, they would send 10 or 12 people, and they would contribute products and such. And, then at the end of the year when we did that awards assembly, they wanted to give some students awards, so I kept calling and calling saying, "Do we want to do this? What do I need you to do?" And, then when we had the assembly, they didn't show up until halfway into the assembly. I don't know, I am sure it was on both parts. I didn't feel like we ever formed a partnership last year actually.

I asked, “Did the previous partner have a contact person there all the time totally for the partnership?” She replied,

Yes, yes. The way this partnership was formed, did not come from the higher ups, just S. and I working together. She never got the higher ups to buy into it. They liked the idea of being a partner, but were never fully committed to it. I think given another year or two, we could have developed something, but it didn’t fly at first, and I have dealt with three or four different partnerships, and it takes a year sometimes to get them on your side. I don’t know, I don’t want to be so critical of them because you don’t really know what you need from them, and they don’t know how they could help you, and sometimes it takes a long time to figure that all out. Plus, they never had a budget.

I asked S., if you don’t have a budget, how can you help us with anything? They were going to do a newspaper for the students last year. They were going to run the copies for us. But we didn’t do that. I was real frustrated with...asking somebody for something two or three times for two or three things and they turn you down; you quit begging them anymore.

I guess I should have involved more people, but I didn’t feel any commitment from them. But, I didn’t see any commitment from them to sit down and form a committee. See what I am saying? If I had thought P. really wanted to be our partner, really wanted to work with us, I never felt like P. was committed at all, and I’ll be very surprised if that changes this year. I think S. and I were a little bit frustrated last year in not doing more than we did. But, I am sure I’m partly responsible for not doing more and I take my share of that.

A number of important themes seem to emerge from this brief oral history. First is the apparent lack of communication between partners. This is demonstrated in the former principal’s frustration that in many instances, phone calls were never returned and letters were never responded to. This was perceived by the principal as a lack of commitment. This seems to suggest the lack of communication translated into a perceived lack of commitment by the business partner. Another theme that emerged from the former principal’s perspective was

lack of interest in the partnership demonstrated by the highest levels in the company. The former principal also stated that you don't really know what you need from them, and they don't know how they can help you. There were no common expectations. Finally, there seemed to be no mutual understanding of the actual meaning of partnership. For the school it was very one sided in nature. The school simply made requests and felt the business should deliver. This concept of "begging" was clearly articulated by the former principal.

### **Current Principal's Perspective**

The next interview for Phase I of the investigation was done in August 1997 with the new middle school principal. As discussed in chapter one, he was familiar with the background of the partnership as well as the intent of this project. Although the amount of information contained herein is significantly less than the first interview, it provides at least a bench-mark with which to gauge his awareness going into this project. I asked, "What do you believe is the current status of our school-business partnership?" He replied,

Gee, I don't really know. I know that you and I met with a representative from P. this summer. She seemed very excited about having a very successful partnership. And, I know that you are going to work very hard to make certain that you do everything in your power to make this a successful partnership. But, I am going to need to wait and see how P. comes through. I think their representative honestly wants this to be successful. But, I know that there are some businesses out there who possibly see the linkage to a school partnership to be a good political move. Some of them are more sincere. I am not saying P. isn't. I think I want to see exactly what transpires this year before I can say how successful our partnership is.

I asked, "Do you think at this point the partnership is not as successful as it could have been?" He replied,

Since this is my first year here...that is probably true. I think the partnership with P. could have been more successful. It is my understanding, and, again,

this is just from speaking to the former principal and other people in the school, the previous partner was a much stronger partnership. I guess we need to go back and look at something in writing to find out what each partner wants out of the partnership. I am not certain we know at this time what P. wants out of this partnership, and what they want to put into it.

I asked, “What contributions do you see this partnership making for children at this school?” He replied,

I think it would be important for the children in the school and the faculty to see how industry works. We are a factory town, not as much as we once were. But, as educators we are probably as unknowledgeable about the industries in our town and what their job involves as they are about ours. I see that as being very beneficial.

Although this interview was somewhat brief, I felt it was valuable in the respect that I knew the new principal’s position a little more clearly. He appeared somewhat skeptical and harbored a “wait and see” attitude. He did seem to recognize the potential value and he seemed willing to support the effort to revitalize the partnership.

### **Business Partner Perspective**

The next part of Phase I involved finding out the perspectives from the business end of the partnership. I was aware from my conversations with the business representative back in June 1997 that the company was indeed ready to pull out of the partnership for reasons discussed previously in Chapter 1. The following conversation is that story from the business partner’s perspective.

I asked, “How did the partnership start?” The partnership business representative, an officer in the company, replied, “I was visiting with the former principal and she said they didn’t have a partner, and I said, ‘Well, P. doesn’t have a partner’, so we decided to check into it.” I asked, “What happened?” The business representative replied,



So, I gave a message to our president, and months and months later we finally addressed it before the board [of Directors] and the board said that we could go forward with a partner. So, then I called the former principal and said we got approval on it. She didn't think she was going to get a response because it had already been five or six months. That was before the beginning of the last school year [1996-97].

I asked, "So that would have been sometime in the early spring of 1996?"

The business representative replied,

Yes. We finalized it over the summer, and then we discussed doing it before the beginning of that school year, and we sat down and sort of came up with some ideas. But, we never got past this point. I formed a committee at P. though, and we had about five people on it. And, the first thing we did was we came to a spaghetti dinner because we started too late to do a back-to-school luncheon type thing, which was one of the things on the school schedule. But, then we got very busy.

I asked, "So who put together the game plan?" The business representative said,

Well, the [former] principal and I sat down and talked about it – what we wanted to do. And she told me what S. L.[previous partner] had done in the past, and I thought we were going to build something off of that. And, I told her what we would be willing to do. As long as we didn't go into major dollars, I wouldn't have to seek other approval. I could go ahead and make the decisions on my own. But once we got into big dollar amounts, I was going to have to seek approval ..., so it was going to be a little more difficult. So she sent us tickets for the spaghetti dinner ....., and I brought about four people up there to the dinner. I tried to get some other things for them (pause)...Let's see, what else did we do. Oh, the next request was they wanted some shirts. But then the next request was for \$5,000 for a travel fund and then more shirts. And, it just kind of followed that course. So there was no interaction between groups -- between the business people and the school, which was what I was shooting for. Now we did set up some meetings with the careers instructor and four or five of us came out and did a presentation, but that only affected the classes that she taught. We wanted to do some luncheons, come in and provide lunch for the teachers, but there were only five of us, and we just didn't get it coordinated. But, everything,

it seems as if everything, was initiated on our end. We kept waiting for some kind of response.

I said, ‘Let me meet with the teachers and see what they see as a real need. Get a group together who is interested, and the [former] principal said, ‘Well, let’s meet first.’ She would meet with me first. Well, and..., we had already met in the summer. So I got with her and she said these are some of the things we can do if you can get me some shirts first. [The former principal said,] I want to develop some team spirit with the teachers and that’s why I need shirts. And, I said, let’s get a group together and meet and see what they want to do. And, she said, “Well let’s just you and me get together and we’ll discuss it before we do a committee.” So that was her response three times over about four months.

Then, finally, I called her and said, wasn’t field day coming up? Didn’t you have something you wanted to do? And, she said, ‘Bring drinks. The kids prefer soda, and we want some more shirts and food.’ And, I just don’t have time to run a party. Well, it was two weeks prior to the event. I was able to get people there, but I just couldn’t get the quantity of shirts she was looking for. Plus, she wanted a design for it, but nobody had a design. So they wanted somebody to design something and print it on the shirt and give it to the kids in a week.

I said, “So, ...three times after the partnership was finalized, you tried to initiate some kind of action, and all three times you didn’t get any response?” The business representative said, “She [former principal] kept putting me off. We’ll talk first, we’ll talk first, just the two of us.” Then I asked, “And how many months would this...” The business representative said, “It would be about a month or two each time, so twice in the fall and then once in the spring, ...and I don’t know...then school just ended by that time.”

I asked, “Did you draw up a contract for the partnership?” The Business representative replied,

No, we were supposed to meet with the Chamber of Commerce, and they called and they were busy. And, the school was too busy, and I guess I wasn’t supposed to be. So, since they could never get a comparable time for

all of us to meet together, we just didn't do it. Because there was no group that was trying to solidify it. I mean, they called and said we need to meet, pick a time, call us, and then we'll tell you what to do. Well, we didn't necessarily need to be told what to do. But, we needed to coordinate something and get something going because we had a basic plan, but we couldn't get past the basic idea.

But, I don't think the input of one person is enough. She told me what S.L. [previous partner] did, but they are so much bigger than we are that I knew we could never do the same things. Plus, they had one person entirely devoted to the program, and that's what they did – partnerships. That was the person's job.

We want to be supportive in the community, but everything had to be approved at the board level. We wanted to do two or three or four things, but we knew we couldn't do everything. A lot of times, from my impression, schools see companies as a money bag with just money to hand out, but I think that is too easy of a fix. We wanted to be involved. I think partnerships are positive and they can be very good, but the expectations need to be changed. We just want to be a good partner period.

This story would seem to indicate once again that a serious lack of communication, perhaps even miscommunication, led to the total shutdown of the partnering process. No one, it seemed, knew what to do. Each seemed not to know what to ask or how to approach the other. The business was very slow with decision making regarding the partnership. This appears to suggest that the partnership was a low priority at the business. This, it seems, perpetuated the breakdown in communication which in turn prevented every other possibility for success. The partnership seemed to be very one-sided and based solely on money. The school made last minute demands and non-flexible requests for either money or products. This seems to indicate that the partnership was also a low priority for the former principal. The absence of goals or a formal agreement on the nature of the partnership appears to be a major downfall. It is evident from the interview that both sides took unilateral actions which created differing expectations on

strategies for the partnership. Because there was no joint planning frustration was inevitable and led directly to the disintegration of the partnership. The partnership was not nurtured. It died of neglect.

### **Faculty Perspective**

It is clear that though a faculty perspective was sought by the business partner from the outset, “Let me meet with the teachers...Get a group together who is interested”, this goal was never achieved. This fact has been provided by the earlier interview data. I do, however, think it is important to the study to include whatever data, obviously limited, that faculty input may provide concerning their perceptions of the partnership.

### **Purposes**

An awareness breakfast was scheduled for early October 1997 to bring together members of the business partner team and the middle school faculty. Details of that meeting will be described later in this work. A faculty questionnaire was also distributed. It was designed to: (1) identify faculty perceptions of the status and effectiveness of the partnership to date, and (2) begin to formulate possible directions the partnership might take. Purpose number one was to measure the teachers satisfaction with the partnership and purpose number two was to gain teacher input on the future courses of action the partnership might take. I shared these questions with both the new principal and the business representative for suggestions and modifications. The questionnaire was field tested on five classroom teachers for further input. We met in the teacher’s lounge and I distributed the questionnaire. The teachers found it very clear and understandable. I distributed the questionnaire at the awareness breakfast to all 63 members of the faculty. All 63 questionnaires were returned at the end of the breakfast. I measured

frequencies of various responses by the faculty and reported the percentages of those responses (see Appendix A). It is the results of questions regarding faculty perceptions that I will concentrate on for Phase I of this investigation.

**Current Status of the Partnership**

A majority of the 63 members of the faculty were unaware that there was a partnership (41%) or felt that the partnership was non-existent (24%). This is clearly a problem for any partnership that hopes to make meaningful contributions to anyone, let alone the children. This lack of awareness can have a serious impact on the early success of the partnership. (Hillage & Others, 1995; National Association for Partners in Education, 1990) One encouraging statistic was that the 24% of the faculty who believed the partnership was in what could be considered the beginning stages (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

Status of the School Business Partnership as Perceived by Faculty, Oct. 1997 N=63

	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Non-existent	15	24
Beginning	15	24
Unaware	26	41
Other	7	11

**Partnership Effectiveness**

Fifteen percent of the respondents felt that the partnership was just beginning. This shows a discrepancy of 9% from the previous section. Perhaps the term “beginning” was too ambiguous. Thirty-eight percent did not know how the

partnership was working. Eighteen percent thought it was not working well or did not observe any partnership activity. These data suggest a problem, once again, in the areas of communication and awareness. Because of the former principal's failure to communicate to the faculty anything having to do with the partnership, there existed a substantial lack of awareness among the faculty members. This would seem to indicate that effective communication and an on-going campaign of awareness as mentioned in the literature (Knight, 1995; National Association for Partners in Education, 1990) may be of benefit to the partnership (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

Faculty Perception of How Well the Partnership is Working, Oct.1997 N=63

	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Compared to previous partner	1	2
Not visible	1	2
Don't know	24	38
Financially	1	2
Beginning	10	15
Needs jump start	1	2
Adequate	6	9
Very well	2	3
Not well	6	9
No activity observed	6	9
Needs communication	5	8

### **Variables that Contributed to the Disintegration**

Interview and questionnaire data seem to indicate that a lack of communication and awareness led to the shutdown of the partnership. This propagated what was perceived to be a lack of commitment from both partners. Sixty-three percent of faculty members were either unaware of the partnership or thought no partnership existed. Fifty-six percent of faculty respondents held a negative view of partnership effectiveness.

The former principal used language such as, "...never got anybody else together...there wasn't any kind of commitment...never heard anything back...They never had a budget." The business representative seemed equally frustrated as she characterized the partnership as having "...no interaction...kept waiting for some kind of response...kept putting me off...." These themes indicate that a lack of awareness, communication, and commitment, as well as, one-sidedness, unilateral actions and differing expectations are the variables that contributed to the disintegration of this school-business partnership (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

Raw Data Matrix of Variables that Contributed to the Disintegration of the School-Business Partnership

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Former Principal</b>	<b>Business Partner</b>
Variables that contributed to the disintegration of the partnership.	<p>Q.#2 Current Status: 63% of faculty were unaware that there was a partnership or felt that the partnership was nonexistent.</p> <p>Q#3 Partnership Effectiveness: 38% did not know how the partnership was working. 18% thought it was not working well or did not observe any activity.</p>	<p>“Just the two of us [were involved]. We never got anybody else together.”</p> <p>“I don’t think we ever really established a partnership. So my feeling was that there wasn’t any kind of commitment.”</p> <p>“I wrote a letter directly to the CEO asking for \$5000 and never heard anything back.”</p> <p>“I called [business representative] ...but never heard anything back.”</p> <p>“They never had a budget. I asked [business representative] if you don’t have a budget how can you help us with anything?”</p>	<p>“There was no interaction between groups—between the business people and the school.”</p> <p>“Everything...seems as if it was initiated on our [business] end. We kept waiting for some kind of response.”</p> <p>“She [former principal] kept putting me off.”</p>
<b>Variables</b>	<p>Lack of communication Lack of awareness</p>	<p>Lack of communication Lack of commitment Unilateral actions One-sided Low priority Differing expectations No joint planning</p>	<p>Lack of communication Lack of commitment No joint planning One-sided Differing expectations Low priority</p>



## **Phase II: Partnership Renewal**

I called the company representative the last week in July and set up a meeting for the following week to discuss the partnership. I told her that I had what I believed to be a useful resource for partnership recovery that I would like to share with her. I met with the company representative on Monday, August 4, 1997, at the middle school and attempted to formulate a game plan for the renewal of the partnership based on the National Association for Partners in Education process for partnership development. I went over the steps in the process with the business representative, and she agreed that this in fact may be a useful resource to which to refer. She felt the stages of the process seemed to make sense, at least at that point in time. It was decided at this meeting that we would move toward approval for revitalizing this partnership from the new principal immediately.

A meeting was scheduled with the principal for Thursday, August 7, 1997, to brief him on the current status of the partnership and elicit his approval and participation in the project. At this meeting, the business representative shared her hope of improving and continuing the partnership. The new principal seemed very open to the possibility of improving the partnership, "I think this would be good for both the school and the company". I explained the parts of the partnership development process to the principal and he agreed, "it sounds like a good approach". The business representative reinforced the hope that the partnership could be a two-way street this time around and that the company wanted the opportunity to participate in a more direct manner. The new principal gave 100% support to the project. He said, "The timing is good because this is a year of change." He also indicated that he would like to move forward with some partnership awareness activities in late September or early October so as to allow everybody time to settle into the new school year.

### **Developing Awareness of the Partnership**

The business representative and I decided that the most logical course of action would be to undertake some sort of awareness activity. I asked the principal when the best time to plan such an activity might be. He said that the best time to plan an activity would be during the normal morning faculty meetings usually held either Tuesday or Thursday before school. The entire faculty would be present and they would not be tired from a long day. The business representative agreed, so, the business representative and I sat down and decided upon a meeting format. We knew we would have a limited amount of time. We did not want to overwhelm teachers with a huge presentation. But, at the same time, we wanted to let them know a partnership existed, demonstrate that the business partner was sincere in its desire to benefit our school, and communicate that desire with a tentative vision from the company on how they generally saw their role in the partnership. We decided that a breakfast for the faculty and then a brief sharing time would be the best approach. I checked with the new principal and he concurred. The business representative indicated that she would reactivate last years partnership committee to participate. She also expressed a wish to bring the breakfast. I offered to arrange for all coffee, juice, plates, and napkins. The meeting date was scheduled for Thursday morning, October 16, 1997.

### **Partnership Awareness Breakfast**

The Partnership Awareness Breakfast occurred on schedule. The business representative was introduced by the principal along with her committee members. She discussed the committee's hopes and tentative vision for the partnership: benefiting the school, more direct involvement, and forming a true partnership. The new principal voiced his support for the continued development of the partnership. Approximately 86 people attended this meeting. Questionnaires were

distributed to the 63 faculty, to gain their perspective regarding our partnership to date. I wanted to gauge their perceptions on the status and effectiveness of the partnership. I also wanted to establish a general direction for the partnership and identify teachers willing to serve on a partnership committee. After the breakfast concluded, the investigator analyzed the questionnaire data collected from the faculty. Because the current status of the partnership and the perception of partnership effectiveness was dealt with in Phase I of this study, I will concentrate on classroom support, partnership contributions for children, and partnership committee issues in Phase II.

### **Direction of the Revitalized Partnership**

Sixty-three faculty members were asked to respond to the question, what can this partnership do to support your work in the classroom? Fifty-two percent of the respondents indicated a need for human resources to support teachers' work in classrooms. This included speakers, mentors, classroom support, tutors, demonstrations, and presentations. Forty-one percent of the respondents identified materials and funding as means of classroom support, while seven percent of the faculty indicated they did not know how the partnership might contribute to their work in the classroom. The last percentage may suggest the need for further awareness activities (see Table 6).

The sixty-three faculty members were also asked, what important contributions do you see this partnership providing for the children at this school? A considerable amount of respondents identified money and material incentives as a means of contributing to students. The majority of responses fell into the realm of human resources (employees of the company) as means of contributing to students at the middle school. A small percentage indicated that they did not know

how the partnership might possibly contribute to the students at the school (Data are in Table 6).

These responses raise some interesting questions. Did the previous principal know what the faculty wanted from a school-business partnership? I am inclined to believe that had the faculty been given more input early on perhaps the requests to the partner may have been for human resource contributions rather than for cash or material donations. Was the previous principal in touch with what the teachers needed at the classroom level? These data seem to indicate that there was a difference in what the faculty wanted and what the administration was asking for from the business partner. The information appears to suggest the need for awareness, communication, and an understanding of faculty concerns and wishes.

To increase faculty participation in the partnering process, the sixty-three faculty members were asked, would you serve on a partnership steering committee? The investigator attempted to determine who might be willing to serve on a partnership steering committee. Nearly all teachers declined to participate (Data are in Table 6).

I wondered what contributed to this unwillingness to participate. One speculation may be that because faculty received such little chance for input historically, their inclination to participate may have been significantly diminished. There was no opportunity for a social exchange between the school and the business. According to Blau (1983), "The basic assumptions of the theory of social exchange are that men enter into social associations because they expect doing so to be rewarding and they continue relations with old associates and expand their interaction with them because they actually find doing so to be rewarding." (p. 204)

**Table 6**

Teachers Expectations of the Partnership and Willingness to Participate in the Partnership, (Oct. 1997), N=63

Expectation	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Support classroom work		
Human resources	32	51
Funding and materials	26	41
Don't know	5	7
Contributions to Children		
Money	17	25
Material incentives	9	14
Role models	8	12
School-to-Work	6	10
Tutors	6	10
People	5	7
Mentors	4	6
Don't know	2	3
Field day	1	1
Newspaper	1	1
Speakers	1	1
Sense of community	1	1
Technology	1	1
Teacher mentoring	1	1
Willingness to Participate		
No	59	94
Need more information	3	5
Yes	1	1

## Assessment of Needs and Resources

I scheduled a meeting two weeks later with the business representative in order to share the results of the questionnaire. I presented the data to the business representative. I told the business representative that as of right now forming a faculty partnership committee was going to be a formidable task based on the responses from the faculty questionnaire. To date, the investigator had been working exclusively with the business representative and the new principal on the project, keeping them informed of developments, seeking input and ideas and generally brainstorming possibilities.

The business representative agreed to share the data with her committee and get back to me with their input. She also agreed to have them complete a business survey instrument also adapted from the National Association for Partners in Education guide. This survey, part of step two of the process, was to be used as a means for identifying potential resources as well as company goals for the partnership. We agreed to meet again in early November.

At the next meeting the business survey had not been completed because the company's production schedule had accelerated dramatically and the survey was put on the back burner for a while. The business representative also informed me at this meeting that the company's partnership committee had decided to interact through e-mail. She told me that this was easiest from everyone's point of view because all of the members worked at different plant locations – some in North Carolina and some in Virginia. With this revelation came the realization that action research at least as I was familiar with it was going to be much different from originally anticipated.

I had envisioned a meeting of two committees – one consisting of school personnel and the other of business personnel – meeting face to face in order to brainstorm ideas, analyze data, and engage in consensus building in order to attack

and conquer the challenges of partnership development. My vision when compared to real world circumstances necessitated what might be considered corrective visioning.

It was decided that due to the structure of the communication, the business representative and the investigator would co-lead this project. The business representative would keep her committee informed as well as asking it for input along the way and the school representative would do the same with the middle school principal since only one faculty member agreed to participate, but did not leave their name.

Sam and I again reviewed the NAPE 12-step partnership development process. In addition, we tried to gauge where we were in the National Association for Partners in Education process. It seemed apparent that as of mid-October to early November, the partnership was still early in the awareness process with our eyes set on the assessment of needs and resources of both partners. Then, with the completion of the middle school survey, that put us one step closer to formulating goals and objectives for the partnership.

Over the course of the next three weeks, I made several contacts inquiring about the status of the business survey. Each time I was told that it had not yet been carried out. I decided not to press the issue and by the last week in November at a meeting with the business representative, I was presented with a narrative detailing what the company was interested in doing with the partnership. This did not necessarily follow my expectations of what I thought was supposed to occur, but this narrative turned out to be a much richer source of information with which to proceed (see Appendix B).

### **Establishing Goals and Objectives**

The process of identifying and defining mutual partnership goals was achieved by combining ideas and comments of the school committee and the business partnership committee through regular meetings of the partnership representatives. During the first week in December 1997, Sam and I met to formulate priority needs and goals and objectives for the school-business partnership. This document came together as a result of identification of areas which both the school representative and business representative could agree upon as mutually beneficial and realistic for a partnership very much in its infancy. We wanted the goals to be do-able. At this meeting, the business representative said she wanted to formulate a mission statement for the partnership. This idea was accepted by the principal and myself and has been crafted by the partnership representatives in a way which ensures that the children are the centerpiece of the initiative (see Exhibit 1).

### **Formalizing the Partnership**

Later that same week, I arranged for a formal partnership signing to take place at the Chamber of Commerce. Representatives of the company (corporate secretary/legal counsel and assistant manager of human resources), the school (principal and school partnership representative) the school system (assistant superintendent) and the Chamber of Commerce were present for the ceremony. In addition, the local newspaper was on hand to take photographs and record details of the signing. This appeared on the front page of the Sunday business section of the local newspaper. The circulation is approximately 22,000. The Chamber of Commerce also published a front-page photograph and story in its monthly newsletter. This newsletter reaches almost 600 local businesses and industries in Southside Virginia.



## **Exhibit 1**

### The Partnership Agreement Between the School and the Business

#### **[Business Name/School Name] Partnership 1997-98**

##### MISSION STATEMENT:

[Business name] and [school name] will work together to develop a mutually supportive partnership that enhances educational opportunities for both partners [and] that provides additional support to both partners through the sharing of resources, talent, and time in order to benefit the children.

##### Priority Need #1:

Improve attendance at [school name].

##### Goal #1:

To create an Attendance Incentive Program to encourage all students to attend school daily.

##### Objective #1:

Improve attendance rates of all students in grade 6, 7, and 8 after implementation of an Attendance Incentive Program. The program rewards students at the end of every six-week grading period for perfect attendance and no time in ISS. The rewards may range from grade-level pizza parties to awards of savings bonds to a perfect attendance winner in each grade.

##### Priority #2:

Educate the [business name] workforce.

##### Goal #2:

To provide an opportunity for [business name] employees to complete their high school education through an off-site GED program.

##### Objective #2:

[Business name] will identify employees interested in completing their high school education.

(exhibit continues)

## **Exhibit 1 (continued)**

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[School name] will provide classrooms, teachers, and a state-funded GED program at the school for [business name] employees.

Successful completion of the program by employees is the intended outcome.

Priority Need #3:

Continued awareness of partnership progress and direction.

Goal #3:

To keep both partners informed of the partnership development process and of the activities, events, and goals of each partner.

Objective #3:

Publish monthly newsletter to be distributed to both partners in order to facilitate communication and awareness.

Priority Need #4:

Opportunity to learn about businesses in the community.

Goal #4:

To provide teachers with an opportunity to tour a manufacturing facility during the hours of operation.

Objective #4:

Groups of teachers will be invited to participate in the company's Discover [business name] program on a quarterly basis.

Priority Need #5:

Contributions to enhance existing programs.

(exhibit continues)

**Exhibit 1 (continued)**

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Goal #5:

To enhance the education of the students and support current programs of [school name].

Objective #5a:

Provide funds to purchase books to donate to the Accelerated Reader Program.

Objective #5b:

Provide t-shirts and sweatshirts for school functions such as cheerleading squad, wrestling team, and teachers.

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## **Implementation of the Partnership**

### **Business Side of the Partnership Committee**

Members of the company's partnership committee, established the year before, consisting of six members, communicated their opinions and approval through e-mail or teleconferences to the business partnership representative. Members of the business partnership committee represented a wide range of positions within the company, including positions in product development, manufacturing, human resources, and legal affairs. According to the business representative, these members were energetic and expressed an interest in the community, education, and children. Three of the members had children in the school system.

### **How the Partnership Operated**

Due to the large number of faculty who stated they would not serve on a partnership committee on the initial survey, I decided to work with the principal and the business partnership representative to get the program off the ground. This meant meeting with the business representative and updating or seeking input from the principal on partnership matters.

### **Program Development**

Programs were developed by the business and school partnership representatives. The school partnership representative and principal discussed program ideas with the team leaders at each grade level to determine the feasibility and potential of the programs. Once a program was implemented, another program was begun.

## **Program Outcomes**

*Goal 1: To create an attendance incentive program to encourage all students to attend school daily.*

Although this initiative was not identified in the early phases of data collection for this study, it was suggested as an area of need by the current administrator who felt as though attendance rates at the middle school were lower than acceptable. After discussing this issue with the business partner, the partner and I agreed that this would be an excellent opportunity for the partnership to encourage good attendance practices which would later benefit the students when they enter the workforce. We sought to identify possible incentives to encourage good attendance. Food, being the first choice of most adolescents, was seen to have the potential to be a highly effective motivator. We did not want to limit the number of participants in the incentive program by creating a contest between homerooms with the class of highest attendance winning. We wanted to create individual opportunities for all students to improve their attendance and be rewarded for doing so. We wanted to recognize perfect attendance, no tardies, and no time in In-School Suspension (ISS) at the end of each six-week grading period. The rewards would include grade-level pizza parties and savings bonds to the perfect attendance winner in each grade.

Initially, I sought to begin this program in the first semester of 1997 with the third grading period. I reminded the current principal a number of times that the program was ready to begin during this grading period. The principal, however, failed to initiate the program before the grading period began.

We decided at this point to shoot for a beginning in the fourth grading period which would begin in January 1998. In the period prior to the fourth six weeks, I continually attempted to get information on the current daily attendance and tardy statistics. Each time I requested this information, the principal replied in the

affirmative, but the information was not delivered. Finally, in March 1998, after the fourth grading period was underway, I convinced Mrs. B. the secretary, of the importance of supplying the business partner with these statistics in order to help the partner discern the effectiveness of the program (See Table 7).

**Table 7**

Number of Students with Perfect Attendance, No Tardies, or Time in ISS

Six-week period	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
First	313	44.7
Second	274	39.1
Third	210	30.0
Fourth	247	35.3

Note. Number of students enrolled at the school was 700.

At the end of the fourth grading period, in March 1998, 247 students participated in the school’s first attendance incentive pizza party. Although the percentages were low, there was still an improvement of 5.3 percentage points over the third grading period. On the surface, it seems that the incentives program stopped what appeared to be a downward decline. The business partner felt that the initial party largely served as an awareness event to advertise the program. We felt that greater communication of the program to students and teachers through flyers and announcements would increase the effectiveness of the endeavor.

*Goal 2: To provide an opportunity for [business name] employees to complete their high school education through an off-site GED program.*

This goal presented one of the greatest challenges to the partnership to date. The employees of the business partner did not want to participate in a GED program on the premises of the business because they did not want their co-workers to know that they did not have a high school diploma. To address this problem, Sam and I initially had envisioned a GED program to be held at the middle school, using the school's computers, classrooms, and possibly teachers. The principal wholeheartedly supported this project, and a list of interested employees was developed by the business representative. However, a number of roadblocks developed. First, I discovered that the city schools had a contract with the local community college. All of the city's continuing education money was channeled to the college, and it carried out the GED programs. The college would hold classes either on campus or at the business location for a fee of \$2,400 for 16 students. The other choice would be for the participants to take classes at the college's adult training center free of charge with classes being held on Monday and Tuesday evening. This program would require only a fee for the general equivalency diploma test of \$35 per person.

This situation presented obstacles for a number of reasons. First, the \$2,400 cost was something the company did not want to absorb for the simple reason that it could be done free at another location. This ruled out the use of school facilities as well as the teachers. Secondly, the existence of the free program at the Uptown Center with an established schedule of Monday and Tuesday nights would eliminate our ability to tailor the program to fit the employees' schedules. Because of scheduling problems, three of the initial 19 students could not participate.

The city and county GED programs differed because the county school system was directly involved in the implementation of the program. The county

school system would bring the program to the location desired by the participants free of charge as long as it was held in the county. The county school system would also tailor the schedule of classes to meet the needs of the employees of the company. We decided to initiate contact with the county schools to establish a GED program for the employees. I called the county GED coordinator and told her of our business partner's interest in a possible program. I gave her the name and number of our partner and she called Sam in order to set up the program. The classes were held at company facilities in the county. Although this method did not align itself with the original plans for this goal, the representatives facilitated the process of enabling sixteen men and women who had previously postponed completing their high school education the opportunity to do so. They received their GED's in May of 1998.

*Goal 3: To keep both partners informed of the partnership development process and of the activities, events, and goals of each partner.*

Initially, I had envisioned having partnership information included as a part of the monthly corporate newsletter. After consulting with the business partner, she decided that this may not be a good idea because the newsletter was distributed to 2,300 employees throughout North Carolina and Virginia, and the school-business partnership only served less than one half of the company's employees. She felt that the newsletter was not the best forum because some employees would feel that the company was favoring one community over another. The middle school principal also felt that inclusion in the company newsletter might be too burdensome for the faculty and staff. He felt it would be "too much for them to read". The investigator concurred. We decided that the best approach would be to create a separate newsletter. The newsletter would be simple, easy to read, and to the point. It would be distributed to all faculty and staff (85 to 90 people) as well



as all executives at the business partner corporate headquarters. Both partners would contribute information for the document. The newsletter would have a co-title identifying the school and business partners. Under the co-title would be the partnership's mission statement. The newsletter would not exceed one page and would provide awareness of the partnership's progress and direction. The newsletter began monthly publication in December 1997 and continued for the remainder of the school year (See Appendix D).

*Goal 4: To provide teachers with an opportunity to tour a manufacturing facility during the hours of operation.*

The business partner invited the teachers and administrators to participate in an existing company program which included a tour of the company's manufacturing operations at three of the company's facilities. I suggested that we invite one teacher from each team and the new principal. After that, we would ask a different teacher each time. The teachers and administrators joined the company's employees in a tour of the facilities led by the company's executive and management team. They toured the weaving and dyeing operations, had lunch provided by the company, and then toured the sewing and shipping operations. To date, a total of 14 representatives from each grade level and administrators have participated in the program. We believed that this program was a value to educators by giving them an opportunity to see and understand the manufacturing processes and to interact with employees. Shortly after the February 1998 program, the investigator spoke with the current principal to get some feedback on the experience. The current principal said,

“The program was very enjoyable and informative. We asked probing questions, and they were able to answer them. I am really glad I went because I can be more supportive, not that I wasn't a supporter before, but it gives me first-hand experience that can help me to persuade others to

participate. In fact, I think I am going to invite [school superintendent] when we do this again in May.”

*Goal 5: To enhance the education of the students and support current programs of the middle school.*

The business partner had demonstrated its commitment to the middle school in a number of ways. Because the faculty knew that I was the partnership contact person I was approached with a number of requests for the business partner. Each request was forwarded to Sam for approval. The cheerleading squad sponsor asked for warm-up uniforms. The wrestling coach asked for team sweats to be worn at matches. The principal asked that the 85 faculty and staff be given sweatshirts with the school’s insignia which they wear every Friday. The principal also asked the business partner to support our Behavior Lottery Assembly by donating goods and merchandise to be given to students for good behavior. The Read Across America coordinator asked the company to send representatives to participate in the annual Read Across America Day which was observed at the middle school. At the request of the Career Exploration teacher, human resource personnel spoke to classes about desirable qualities future employees should exhibit during the application and interview process. Finally, a request was made by the librarian for a monetary donation for the purchase of computer software for the school’s Accelerated Reader program. In each of these cases the requests were honored by the business partner. The last in the amount of three hundred dollars.

In addition, the company (Sam’s idea) recognized the faculty and staff during National Education Week with food and cards of appreciation. The company allowed employees to participate in field trips to Washington, D.C. and Richmond, VA because they had children going on these trips.

### **Changes in Faculty Perceptions**

The sixty-three faculty were given a follow-up questionnaire consisting of three of the original five questions asked in October 1997 (see Appendix-A). The questionnaire was distributed at a faculty meeting in March of 1998. All 63 questionnaires were returned. My intent was to measure improvement of faculty perceptions related to the partnership.

The data in Table 8 indicate a much improved faculty perspective on the status of the partnership when compared to the figures from the fall of 1997. Almost two-thirds of respondents perceived the partnership improved, positive, in great shape or good. The investigator attributes this improvement to enhanced communication and awareness through the partnership newsletter and the participation of business representatives and faculty members in programs conducted both at the school and at the business.

The faculty was also asked how well they thought the partnership was working. The figures in Table 9 have improved when compared to the initial findings from the fall of 1997. The enhanced communication and awareness are important factors in this improvement. These factors did not exist prior to the revitalization of the partnership.

**Table 8**

The Current Status of the School Business Partnership as Perceived by the Faculty, (1998) N=63

	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Improved	14	22
Good	12	19
Positive	10	16
Okay	7	11
Very active	6	10
Great shape	5	8
Supportive	4	6
Don't know	5	8
Total	63	100

**Table 9**

How well the partnership is working from a faculty perspective, (1998) N=63

	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Well or very well	22	35
Fine	14	22
Okay	11	17
Great	9	15
Not good	2	3
Didn't know	5	8
Total	63	100

The faculty were asked if they would serve on a partnership steering committee. Twenty-eight percent of faculty respondents indicated that they would be willing to serve. This constitutes a 27 percentage point improvement in the number of potential participants when compared to the findings of fall 1997. Although there were still a significant number of faculty declining to participate, I interpret these data as a “small victory” when compared to the 94 percent who responded negatively in the fall of 1997 questionnaire (see Table 10). Also seen as encouraging is the overall improvement in positive responses versus negative responses when fall 1997 and spring 1998 data are compared (see Table 11).

**Table 10**

Willing to Serve on a Partnership Steering Committee, (1998) N=63

	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	17	28
Need more information	6	9
No	40	63
Total	63	100

**Table 11**

Comparison of Teachers' Positive and Negative Responses Between Fall 1997 and Spring 1998, N=63

	Fall 1997		Spring 1998	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Current Status				
Negative	41	65	5	8
Positive	15	24	58	92
Neutral	7	11	0	0
How Well the Partnership is Working				
Negative	49	78	2	3
Positive	13	20	56	89
Neutral	1	2	5	8

### **Partnership and Leadership: An Anecdote**

I wanted to share an unfortunate experience regarding the recognition of our business partner at the school's end-of-year awards assembly. I had taken care of plans to recognize the good work and contributions of our business partner over the school year. This included the wording and design of a plaque to be presented to the business at the awards assembly.

Money was allocated by the principal (\$22.00), and he said he would be happy to make the presentation. I brought the plaque to the principal a week before the assembly. Two weeks earlier I called the business representative inviting her to attend the assembly where they were to receive the award. The

business representative was pleased and indicated that she and another company executive would attend.

The morning of the assembly arrived and everything began on time with the two business partner executives seated on the front row. The assembly lasted approximately two hours with numerous awards being distributed. As time went on it seemed that the business partner award was being saved until the end. Then, after two hours of waiting, much to my horror, the principal thanked the students for their good behavior and the parents for attending, and adjourned the assembly.

As everyone was standing to exit, I ran from the back of the auditorium past the stunned business partner executives and up to the foot of the stage. I politely reminded the principal of what he had forgotten. The principal told me that he thought the plaque might be in his office. I volunteered to retrieve it at once. At this point the principal announced to the exiting masses that there was one other award left to present.

This is an unfortunate example of how public schools sometimes treat business partners. The principal probably did not do this intentionally, he just did not care enough to remember!

### **Incentives to the Business**

There are a number of incentives that our business partner has derived from the partnership. Some of these incentives are the satisfaction that comes from building and developing what had the potential to be a long-lasting and effective relationship and the recognition from the local community and other businesses which were aware of the partnership. These were all very important incentives necessary to produce reciprocal benefits to the partners. According to Barnard (1938), "...the distribution of incentives must be proportioned to the value and effectiveness of the various contributions sought." (p. 160)

Recognition came from the local Chamber of Commerce which nominated our partnership for a Partnership in Excellence School and Business Award for 1997-98. In addition, there were a number of tangible benefits our business partner received. Use of the gymnasium and school fitness track had been offered to and utilized by employees for basketball games and fitness workouts. The auditorium and mini-theatre were used for company business meetings as well. Our business partner was recognized in the spring during our awards assembly for their contributions to our school-business partnership. In addition, our business partner was chosen to receive the local education association's "1998 Whole Village Award" for its work and contributions as partner to the middle school.

### **Summary**

As a result of this study, I found that among the factors that contributed to the disintegration of the partnership were a lack of awareness of the partnership by the faculty. This resulted from poor communication to the faculty by the former principal regarding the partnership. In addition, other factors which led to the breakdown included: a lack of communication between participants, unilateral actions, no joint planning, low priority for participants, one-sidedness, differing expectations, and a perceived lack of commitment by both the school and the business.

I found that the factors that must be present to revive and revitalize a dying partnership include: communication, awareness, reciprocal benefits, clear goals and objectives, ability to carry out on-going evaluation of the partnership, and use of the NAPE process as a diagnostic and prescriptive resource for partnering.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

#### **Summary**

I carried out a ten month project involving the process of revitalizing a dying school-business partnership. In Phase I of the study I found that a lack of communication between the partners existed to such an extent that all other possibilities for success had been stifled. In Phase II of the investigation, we went about the process of attempting to revitalize the partnership using data collected in Phase I and the National Association for Partners in Education 12-step partnership development process as a resource. Steps one through six and 11 and 12 were used for this project. We sought to improve communication between the partners and begin the process of building a viable partnership for the long term. Participants were satisfied with the progress made and agreed to renew the partnership for the 1998-99 school year. In addition, the partnership was nominated for an award by the local Chamber of Commerce and won the 1998 “Whole Village” award sponsored by the local education association for its work with the middle school.

#### **Conclusions**

Communication was the number one factor contributing to the breakdown of this partnership. For any partnership to be effective, there must be an on-going program of communication and awareness for all of the stakeholders involved. Therefore, it would be important to the success of the partnership that there be regular meetings that involve people from the school and the business. These should include faculty, staff, and improved leadership by the current principal.

Clear, measurable goals and objectives must be mutually decided upon and evaluated on an on-going basis as well. The goals and objectives must be realistic and doable taking into consideration the time and resources available for both partners.

Small victories early in the process will facilitate the long-term success of the partnership because these victories provide the momentum and awareness needed for the partnership to move forward.

For any partnership to succeed, there must be support from the principal of the school and the CEO of the business.

The presence of a contact person for the school and for the business is a quintessential factor in keeping the lines of communication and awareness open. Without the presence of school and business contacts, chaos will ensue. In situations where schools and businesses are involved in partnerships with no key contacts, breakdowns in communication may result. For business partners, time means money and the lack of a school contact person often results in confusion, wasted resources, and lack of recognition for the contributions made. In Phase I of the investigation, none of these essential factors developed. This lack of development was the result of no real communication taking place. The partnership, in essence, was dying of one-sidedness and neglect by the former principal.

I conclude that the National Association for Partners in Education 12-Step partnership development process is an excellent resource and tool for the recovery of a partnership in demise. The National Association for Partners in Education process clearly demonstrated its usefulness in the recovery of this partnership. The process served to provide guide posts once we got started. We saw what had not been done as well as what needed doing. This gave us a reference for diagnosing the problems that existed prior to the recovery. In essence, it helped the

participants to prescribe what treatment was necessary for recovery and development to begin.

The National Association for Partners in Education steps were not necessarily linear in progression. All of the steps were not used, and some steps, such as awareness, communication, evaluation, and recognition arose again and again. Recruitment, assignment, orientation, and training did not come into play at this point in the development of the partnership. These steps were not relevant to the priority needs, goals, and objectives the partnership had established for the first year. We anticipated using these steps as the partnership strengthened and developed into a more sophisticated endeavor.

### **Discussion**

This project was an action research study done to correct a problem that existed at my middle-school. We determined what the problem was and took action to correct it. As a result of Phase II of the study, the factors which were identified and implemented successfully by the partnership are corroborated by the literature. The partnership engaged in an on-going campaign of communication and awareness (Cobb & Quaglia, 1994; Hillage, 1995); identified clear, measurable goals and objectives that were mutually acceptable (Boyer, 1983; Gray, 1984; Mulkey, 1995; Stead & Eyring, 1994); identified resources of benefit to both partners (Bassinger, 1994; Blau, 1964 and 1983; Knight, 1995); attempted to develop support from the hierarchy of both institutions; and had in place designated contact persons to facilitate the progress and direction of the partnership. In addition, the partnership continued to monitor its progress to measure its successes and adapt to changing needs (Blake & Pfeifer, 1993; Gray, 1984; Schwartz, 1990). This connection is also clearly demonstrated in the

National Association for Partners in Education partnership development process used in phase II of this project.

Because the partnership was a low priority for the school in the beginning, a number of challenges had to be dealt with. First, in my role as a teacher-leader, I was charged with keeping the principal informed while at the same time not encroaching on administrative territory. In addition, it would be my job to encourage participation from the faculty without pushing too hard and turning them off to the partnership.

With respect to encroaching on administrative territory, my concerns were, for the most part, unfounded. The principal seemed more relieved than anything else that someone was willing to take the lead in this situation. The project gave him one less thing to worry about. With respect to encouraging participation of faculty, I clearly made the mistake of not trying hard enough to recruit faculty members in the beginning of the project.

I also came to the realization that just because a project is important to me does not necessarily mean it will become the center of everyone else's universe. In the real world people have responsibilities. The fact that our business partner took the time to try and make a difference is very commendable. Did they perform exactly as I had envisioned? No, but the real world seldom does.

In retrospect, the business people were almost heroic in their efforts. This company, as it turns out, was failing. These people had their jobs and livelihoods to be concerned about. The very survival of the company was a daily concern for them. The fact that they continued to work to improve the partnership in the face of such adversity clearly demonstrates a powerful sense of community. For people like these, we should all be thankful and hopeful for the future of our children

## **Implications for Practice**

As a result of this study and a review of the supporting literature, I believe that the major ingredients necessary for partnership development are communication; awareness; reciprocal benefits; mutually acceptable, clear goals and objectives; on-going formal evaluation; and recognition of good works by the stakeholders. I also advocate the use of the NAPE partnership development process as both a diagnostic and prescriptive resource for partnering.

The final outcome of this study demonstrates the need for schools to seek out multiple partners. Like mutual funds to the investor, multiple partnerships can lessen the impact of partnership loss on the school. In the meantime, other partners may be able to provide potential leads for forming new partnerships.

It is the investigator's opinion that when partnerships have the major ingredients as identified above, a mutually supportive and generous collaboration will develop. A partnership based on trust and community building, not on one-sidedness and materialism, is the type we must all strive to create and nurture.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

A study should be carried-out to determine how school-business partnerships improve student performance in school. This could provide statistical data that is sorely lacking in this area of study. If student academic performance is found to have been improved, this may serve to bolster the rationale for creating new school-business partnerships.

Another area of research could involve studying school-business partnerships at different levels of the evolutionary process. These studies could provide important data on creating and sustaining partnerships over many years. Why have these partnerships endured over time?

I also recommend a study of partnerships that have been in existence for ten, fifteen, or even twenty years. This could potentially provide data on what worked and what did not. This could be of value to others who are attempting to renew or refocus languishing long-term partnerships.

I further recommend a study of partnerships that have completely failed. Analysis of factors behind the failure could aid in the development and success of new partnerships.

These studies could provide important data to many involved in school-business partnerships. These are questions worth considering as researchers strive to understand and refine this very complex community endeavor.

### **Epilogue**

In June of 1998 I attempted to contact the business representative. I left six messages over the course of three weeks. Each time I was told the business representative would get back to me. She never did.

At the end of July I called again and finally was able to get in touch with the business representative. I told her I was looking forward to the new school year and that I wanted to explore expanding our partnership. I hoped for more employee participation as well as bringing more faculty on to the partnership committee.

She told me that she could not meet for a while but would mail me a list of ideas on possible directions for the partnership in the new school year. I gave her my home address and looked forward to hearing from her.

By the end of September I still had not heard from her. I attempted to contact the business representative once again. I left a message, but my call was never returned. In December 1998 I learned that the business representative as well as a number of key executives were no longer with the company. In looking

back to the spring of 1998, two plants had been closed and some jobs had been moved to other plants. The publication of the 1998 annual report raised the possibility that the company might close. The report also stated that the company “suffered a net loss of 36 million dollars for the year.” The report cited the acquisition of two distributorships in which the company paid almost 52 million dollars in cash as the beginning of its financial problems. The company also suffered losses when Latin American contractors “failed to meet time and quality expectations.” In the spring and early summer of 1999 every major company officer had resigned. The company’s newly renovated headquarters in [City Name] closed and was sold. By late summer and early fall of 1999 some 900 workers were let go and all remaining company operations ceased. Front page headlines in the local newspaper declared: “From \$89 million in assets, [Company Name] ends up worthless.” This has had a tremendous impact on the local economy in Southside Virginia which has also suffered the loss of over 2000 jobs resulting from the failure of other textile companies in the area.

This is an unfortunate reality that schools and communities face all over this country. The challenge will be in attempting to create new and viable school-business partnerships as we move into a very uncertain future.

School-business partnerships, like all other human endeavors, require understanding, nurturing, and support. By attempting to understand and embrace the needs of each partner, the true promise of this very human endeavor may be realized.

Overall, school-business partnerships have the potential to make a lasting and dynamic impact on the American educational scene. It is through attempting not only to create partnerships but to understand them that we will be enabled, as members of a learning community, to maximize those benefits for the sake of our children.

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**Appendix A**  
**Faculty Questionnaire**

- 1 What do you believe is the current status of our school-business partnership?
- 2 What can this partnership do to support your work in the classroom?
- 3 How well do you think the partnership is working?
- 4 What important contributions do you see this partnership providing for children at this school?
- 5 Would you be willing to serve on a partnership steering committee?

## **Appendix B**

### **Business Action Plan**

Re: [Business Name/School Name]

Greg,

Move ahead with the attendance incentive program. I have approval. We want representatives to be present on those days to stress the importance of attendance in the workplace.

Determine whether 2-4 teachers can attend the Discover [Business Name] plant tour. We will send invitations to them.

We may have interest in using the gym and other school facilities such as the mini-theater and fitness track if we know the hours available.

I will place December 2 on the schedule to attend a signing of our formal contract at the chamber.

We are interested in pursuing the GED program if we can determine the appropriate steps to take. [Name of Individual] is the Human Resource Manager at the [City Name] plant. He is trying to determine the level of interest. What is the minimum number of students? Are state funds available? We do have an Educational Assistance Policy which will reimburse employees. We need to determine times and dates.

The consensus is that we will not pay for big ticket items. We will be willing to provide material and financial resources within reason. We want to be more “hands on” this year.

Can you get me more information on the Accelerated Reader Program and let me know the costs of the program, whether the library needs more books or what incentives are being considered? I want to give it some thought.

The concept is being a true partner, the school benefits and we benefit. Let me know what you think.

We're Rolling!

[Name of Business Representative]

**Appendix C**  
**Letter of Intent**

[Business Name] & [School Name]  
Letter of Intent to Renew the Partnership  
for  
Contract Renewal  
of the  
School-Business Partnership

We the undersigned, mutually satisfied with the progress of the partnership to date, do intend to renew our school-business partnership for the 1998-1999 school year. Goals and objectives for the new year will be jointly developed during the summer of 1998 and a formal signing ceremony will take place in the fall of 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_  
[Business Representative Signature]

\_\_\_\_\_  
[School Principal Signature]

Spring 1998

# Appendix D

## Partnership Newsletter

[School - Business Name]

### Partners in Excellence

Mission Statement: [Business Name] and [School Name] will work together to develop a mutually supportive partnership that enhances educational opportunities for both partners, that provides additional support to both partners through the sharing of resources, talent, and time in order to benefit the children.

Issue # 2

February 1998

<b>1997-98 Goals Set</b>	<b>Discover [Business Name]</b>
<p>The has established this years goals based on the school and business survey results from last fall.</p> <p>Goal # 1: Create an attendance incentive program to encourage all students to attend school daily.</p> <p>Goal # 2: Provide an opportunity for [Business Name] employees to complete their high school education through an off-site GED program.</p> <p>Goal # 3: Continued awareness of partnership progress and direction.</p> <p>Goal # 4: Learn about businesses in the community.</p> <p>Goal # 5: Enhance the education of the students and support current programs of [School Name].</p>	<p>Three [School Name] teachers participated in the Discover [Business Name] program on December 11, 1997. They were invited to tour [Business Name's] manufacturing facilities located in [City Name] along with 29 [Business Name] employees from other facilities.</p> <p>We at [Business Name] feel that this program is a value to [School Name] teachers by giving them an opportunity to see and understand the manufacturing processes and talk with employees.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>[Business Name, Inc.]</b></p> <p>[Business Name] is a local manufacturer of fleece and jersey apparel. Founded in 1986, the company operates facilities in [City Names].</p> <p>In addition to it's manufacturing operation, the company recently acquired two distributors based in [City/State Name] and [City/State Name]. The company employees approximately 2,500 people.</p> <p>[Business Name] manufactures t-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts, and pants for entertainment, retail, and branded customers as well as wholesale distributors. Visit our outlet at [Location Name] to see our products!</p>



## VITA

Gregory Martin is a graduate of the Salem City Public School System in Salem, Virginia. He received his undergraduate degree from Roanoke College, also located in Salem, Virginia. He holds a Master of Education Degree from the University of Virginia and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia.

His teaching career began in 1986. He has taught grades four, six, and seven. He has served as a high school coach in track and field and cross-country and as an official of the Virginia High School League. He is a member of the National Education Association, Phi Delta Kappa, the Virginia Association for Partners in Education, and the American Educational Research Association. He was the recipient of the 1997 Outstanding Middle School Teacher Award from the Curry Foundation at the University of Virginia. Gregory Martin currently resides in Roanoke, Virginia, with his wife Anne and daughter Allison.