

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Partnerships between schools and businesses are not a recent phenomenon. In fact, The Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act of 1917 and subsequent federal legislation references the strength of partnerships. Effective vocational programs in this country have established linkages to the business community (Dykman, 1996). More recently, other educational programs have discovered the benefits of involving businesses in the total school program. Educational partnerships to improve elementary and secondary education have developed in thousands of school districts. President Ronald Reagan proclaimed 1984 as the year of “Partnerships in Education” and since then partnerships between business and schools have dramatically increased. In 1984 the U.S. Department of education counted 46,338 business education partnerships in 4000 (25 percent) of the nation’s school districts. Also, in 1984, 46 governors initiated state-level task forces for business/education partnerships. By the following year, 27 states had started implementing their plans. From 1983 to 1988 total partnerships between business and school sites increased from 40,000 to 140,000 (Zeleny, 1996,p.2). This upward trend has continued in the nation and in Virginia. In 1991, more than 80 percent of school divisions in Virginia reported partnership activities with business (Phillips, 1991, p.156).

These partnerships come in many different varieties. However, they can be described in one of four categories as defined by the National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE, 1991).

1. Direct student support: focused on supporting, enriching, and improving existing school activities. Much of the volunteer activity involves one-on-one assistance to individual students, small group instruction, or working with an entire classroom. Common types of activity are tutoring, mentoring, delivery of career awareness programs, implementation of scholarship and incentive programs, and provision of in-kind materials and financial resources to enhance what is currently being done.

2. Programmatic support is focused on developing new program initiatives that will help the school achieve district goals and objectives for instruction and learning. Partner organizations work with the schools and sometimes-central office administrators to develop programs that target specific curriculum and or student and teacher needs. Activities may include developing programs focusing on dropout prevention; attendance; student achievement in specific content areas; technology skills of students and teachers; curriculum development; teacher development in a variety of areas; and parent involvement.

3. Compact, alliances and collaborative efforts: this level of involvement is created through joint efforts among several business and/or community organizations and one or several schools/school districts within a region. These efforts focus on the coordination of resources and/or major school restructuring efforts in such areas as curriculum, school administration, and the management and delivery of instruction. Such collaborative efforts may center on a major reform strategy such as developing a

school-to-career system with area businesses. These activities are most likely to be carried out at the school district level, although they sometimes reach out across a state or even a larger geographic region.

4. Policy change: This level of involvement focuses on developing and advocating policy changes which are planned and implemented as business leaders, educators, and members of community organizations work together to reduce bureaucratic rules and regulations; advocate proposed policy changes at the legislative level; and follow through on these efforts to ensure that these changes are supported through adequate financing and programs. These activities usually take place at the community or regional level and sometimes extend to the state or national level policy arenas (NAPE, 1997, p.2)

During the 1990's there have been many further studies conducted on school business partnerships. Some examples of the studies were: rebuilding the home-school-community-business partnership; understanding the process of building business/education partnerships; establishing partnerships as a force for educational change; and formulating partnerships with a specific focus, e.g., mentoring partnerships (Zeleny, 1996,p.3). However, there have been very few studies with a statewide focus in Virginia. In fact, the author is aware of only two such studies and both were conducted during the 1990-91 school year. The first was the "1990-91 Statewide Survey of Virginia's School/Community Partnerships" conducted by Elise Harrison. This study was jointly sponsored by The Virginia Department of Education, The Virginia Chamber of Commerce, and

the Virginia Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, and was funded by a grant from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services. The second study, "The Current Status of Public School/Business Collaborative Activities in Virginia" was conducted by Larkin Phillips.

Why Partnerships?

In order for partnerships to be effective they must benefit all partners in some meaningful way. For example, Clifford A. Migal of the Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Development describes successful partnerships in this way, "A partnership is like a marriage: both parties must work at it daily, trust each other and be open minded, honest and willing to compromise in the best interest of the relationship" (Migal, 1996, p11). In effective partnerships all participants benefit, although financial contributions are often a part of an education/business partnership, most partnerships focus on mutually beneficial short-term and long-term objectives or outcomes that are mutually beneficial. Educators gain the opportunity to enlarge the world for students thus influencing the quality of education for students and the skills those students eventually bring to a career. These opportunities are unlimited and are much too broad to include all of them in this work however it is important to mention a few of them. Innovative science, math and technology projects, both inside and outside the classroom can be a direct benefit to students. Benefits for educators also include opportunities to boost teacher professionalism by participating in conferences, and endowments for training, consulting, or research that give teachers opportunities to build new skills. Schools can also benefit from corporate know

how in the areas of strategic planning, information management, team building and collaboration, and public relations.

Business also has much to gain from partnerships. Positive exposure and the satisfaction of having participated in the educational process are two of the ways a business can benefit from a partnership. But business also can benefit from the unique resources schools offer. For example, most companies recognize the critical value of staff training. As a business changes peoples jobs change and new skills are required. Unless they're prepared, people may not be able to assume new roles and responsibilities. Educators can tangibly help business meet the unique needs of the changing work environment in several ways. Expert teachers can teach employees new skills and help corporate trainers stay current on educational teaching techniques. Educators can share educational research on learning theories that can be applied to learning environments and work. Schools also have facilities and technology that business can use to train employees.

Need for the Study

While school business partnerships have been addressed in research in the past there is very little current research on a national level. There is even less research on the status of school business partnerships in Virginia. In 1991 Harrison made the following observation, "Across the Commonwealth, there is the realization that public schools must change in order to enable Virginia to compete. But schools can not make these changes in isolation, they need a committed involvement from their local communities, as well as regional and

state-level leadership and support” (Harrison, 1991,p.5). Have these communities, especially the business community, become full partners or even partial partners in educating the students of Virginia? Unfortunately, the answer is negative and there is a void, which exists currently in the area of school/business collaborative activities in the Commonwealth. There have been no studies conducted on this subject since the 1990-91 school year. Meanwhile, the climate in public schools in Virginia experienced substantial change including the introduction of elected school boards to the Commonwealth, as well as the introduction of the Standards of Learning for Virginia’s schools. Both of these changes have the potential to change the way schools and business deal with each other. School boards which were once made up mostly of appointed business professionals who were logically pro business education partnerships no longer exists. There is no current evidence that shows the extent that business and industry is involved in partnerships with the public schools of Virginia. Therefore, there is a need to study the current status of school business partnerships to determine how business and industry interact with public schools in the Commonwealth.

Statement of the Problem

There currently is no comprehensive database on school community partnerships in Virginia. If a statewide initiative to promote partnerships is going to be successful there is a need for data to use in measuring progress.

Definition of Terms

(A) **Collaboration:** “The process by which two or more different kinds of individuals and/or groups cooperate in activities for mutual benefit” (Institute For Education Leadership, Inc. 1982, p.3).

(B) **Partnership:** “An agreement between school and business representatives to a mutually acceptable set of purposes and the means for achieving such purposes” (Kalish, 1987, p.8).

(C) **Educational Foundation:** “An independent, nonprofit organization that raises funds to supplement, not supplant, school programs” (Kalish, 1987, p.9)

(D) **School Division:** “Shall be composed of no more than one county or city unless consolidated or altered by the State Board of Education” (Virginia Department of Education, 1972, p. 132).

(E) **Local Composite Index:** “Index of local ability to pay costs of Standards of Quality” (Phillips, 1991, p.4)

(F) **School Division Size:** “For the purpose of this research the following school division size classifications for the 1998-99 school year are used: between 0 and 2,500 students is a small division; between 2501 and 9,000 students is an average size division; between 9,001 and 15,00 students is a large division; and above 15,00 students is a very large division” (Phillips, 1991 p.4).

(G) **City School Division:** Division designated as city by the Virginia State Department of Education (Phillips, 1991 p. 4)

(H) **Rural School Division:** “Attendance area is characterized by open land and sparse population. School division attendance area may have small towns, but is located away from cities. Rural school division may or may not be located within a designated Virginia Employment Commission Standard Metropolitan Area (S.M.A.)” (Phillips, 1991, p.5)

(I) **Suburban School Division:** “ Attendance area is located near a city having a significant resident population. Major industry is located within the attendance area or in the neighboring city. Suburban school division is located within a Virginia Employment Commission S.M.A”. (Phillips, 1991, p.5).

(J) **Town School Division:** Designated as a town by the Department of Education (Phillips, 1991, p.5).

(K) **Standard Industrial Classification (SIC):** “SIC is the statistical classification standards underlying all establishment based Federal economic statistics classified by industry. SIC defines industries in accordance with the composition and structure of the economy” (Phillips, 1991, p. 5).