CREATING SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS THAT WORK

A Guide for Practice and Research

Frances Kochan
Dana M. Griggs, Editors

Creating School Partnerships That Work

A Guide for Practice and Research

A Volume in
Dimensions of Leadership and Institutional Success:
Exploring Connections and Partnerships

Series Editor

Ellen H. Reames
Auburn University

Dimensions of Leadership and Institutional Success: Exploring Connections and Partnerships

Ellen H. Reames, Editor

Creating School Partnerships That Work:
A Guide for Practice and Research (2020)
edited by Frances Kochan and Dana M. Griggs

Rural Turnaround Leadership Development:
The Power of Partnerships (2018)
edited by Ellen H. Reames

Creating School Partnerships That Work

A Guide for Practice and Research

edited by

Frances Kochan
Auburn University, Alabama

Dana M. Griggs
Southeastern Louisiana University

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

CREATING SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

An Overview

Frances Kochan
Auburn University, Alabama

This is a unique book. If you care about schools and schooling and how partnerships may help to strengthen and improve them and the institutions that partner with them, you should read it! This is a book containing stories and research about school partnerships from a variety of groups and perspectives, each focused upon multiple issues within educational institutions and communities within the United States. The final chapter, which is a *MUST* read, presents an analysis across all the partnerships to identify the elements that fostered and hindered their success and the primary lessons learned. This analysis should provide meaningful information for those engaged in developing and operating similar partnerships or those involved in conducting research on or about them. Although the cases presented in this book occur within the United States, the findings may also have relevance for similar initiatives in other countries.

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS IN THE UNITED STATES

Partnerships denote relationships which are mutually beneficial to the parties involved and which result in mutual benefits for those who create and engage in them. The partnership presented in this book provides ample evidence of the value and benefits of these arrangements. School partnerships have a long history in the United States. The inception of public schooling was a type of partnership with the community. The concept of local school boards and local control was integral to the establishment of schools and the idea that public education is a public good has deep roots in the country.

Although states and the national government have expanded involvement and, in some cases control, over various aspects of schooling in the country, there is still a broad range of entities that work with schools to create and manage mutually beneficial partnerships. Among the most prominent are local, state, and national parent groups and partnerships, which engage families in student education, development, and success (Graham, 2011; Woyshner & Cucchiara, 2017) and local and corporate businesses and other community agencies, which help expand financial and other resources (Griggs, 2015; Grobe, 1990; Smallwood, 1987). The last three decades have seen a rise in partnership networks between schools to foster student success (Epstein, 2010; Tell, 1999) as well as the expansion of partnership arrangements between schools and institutions of higher education focused on enhancing the preparation of school professionals (Holmes Partnership, 2006; Mendels, 2016; Orr et al., 2010; Reames & Kochan, 2015). This period also included a rise in collaborations focused on enhancing the diversity of employees in business and other professions (Clutterbuck, 2012; Ramos-Diaz et al., 2020) and an expansion of partnerships with public and private groups geared toward fostering school and student success and to improving various aspects of the home or community (Epstein, 1995; Kochan, 1999; McConchie, 2004; Soutullo et al., 2019). Partnerships have also been incorporated into many federal mandates such as the Higher Education Act of 1998 and in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Hudson, 2016).

Although partnerships exist quite broadly, and there is a body of research about them, this research is limited (Graham, 2011). Additionally, research on the topic of school partnerships tends to focus on a particular type of partnership (i.e., school/university partnerships to enhance teacher preparation and/or leadership preparation and student learning; school/community partnerships to enhance parental and community involvement in schools; or school/community partnerships to support student learning outside of school. Findings from the research studies on these partnerships tend to be appropriate for the settings and types of partnerships

being studied, but little has been done to look at partnerships across varied groups and purposes.

Additionally, there is not yet a well-defined, broadly accepted conceptual framework for these partnerships which captures their essence and helps those who wish to create successful collaborations grasp those elements that will enable them to succeed. Epstein (1995) developed a model for family-school partnerships, which is still widely used or used in an adapted form (Graham, 2011; McConchie, 2004). Many years ago, I examined this issue in a school partnership focused on creating a sense of family within the school, across the families whose children attended the school and between the school and the community and I developed a framework for their operation and success from the findings (Kochan, 1999). More recently, Griggs (2015) examined these factors as they relate to a school/business partnership, creating a model. Hudson (2016) also addressed facilitating and hindering factors inherent in a partnership between schools and a university educational leadership program designed to prepare successful leaders and enhance school success. He also created a conceptual framework from this partnership to capture the elements that supported and hindered partnership success. Barnett et al. (2010) provide a potential generic framework for partnerships, but it primarily describes stages and types of partnerships, rather than looking at how to foster success. This book provides a foundation for developing that knowledge base.

The findings gleaned from across the chapters in this book represent a broad array of partnerships, each with a unique population and purpose. Examining why they have succeeded and the elements that have served as barriers to that success opens up new vistas for practitioners as they engage in program development and assessment. It also provides researchers with a broader array of understandings and possibilities for future study and provides avenues for building and assessing school partnerships and for researching this important topic.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The book begins with a chapter by Dana M. Griggs, who describes a school-industry partnership in a rural setting. The school had just undergone a transition from being a traditional high school to one with college and career academies. School administrators reached out to a local business to seek their help to better prepare high school students for "college careers and life." The business academy in the school serves as the central context for the partnership. In this partnership, industry personnel come to the school, present and work with students and teachers so that they will be more familiar with the world of work and how to foster successful careers. They serve as mentors to students and teachers. In turn, they learn about

the struggles that teachers and students have, gain knowledge about the future generation that assists them in their workplaces and is often able to recruit and support students on their career trajectory. Griggs reports on a research study she conducted on the partnership to identify elements that fostered partnership success from the perspective of those engaged in the endeavor.

In the next chapter, Marco Nava and Imelda Nava describe a partnership involving a wide variety of entities implemented to improve school outcomes. The two urban schools in this partnership which have large percentages of students from low-income families, many of whom are also non-English speaking learners, were faced with budget cuts. School leaders took the initiative to help alleviate the impact of these budget shortages using a multipronged approach. One of the strategies they employed to foster academic success was creating partnerships which included family and community members in the decision-making process. They established working councils' representative of all groups "to make fiscal and human resource decisions based on data and moral imperatives aligned to the schools' vision." The concept of partnership is integrated into the decision-making process at all levels. Additionally, the culture of the school incorporates the essence of partnership and collaboration. Their research data reveals that the involvement of so many people from diverse backgrounds and perceptions has resulted in numerous initiatives that met student needs and ultimately, fostered increased student achievement and school success.

Anita Walker and Tonya Conner provide the third chapter, in which a school initiated a partnership. In this arrangement, the initiating partner was the principal of a small elementary school in a rural setting who reached out to a faculty member in a department in an institute of higher education. The two already had a personal and working relationship which formed a strong basis of trust upon which the partnership was built. The partnership was initiated to enable school staff to engage in an examination of their perceived needs, the needs and achievement levels of students, the culture and operations of the school and develop a plan and engage in a process that would enhance school culture, structures, and operations, and all aspects of teaching and learning. The partnership focused initially on improving overall school culture, which in turn led to other innovations and higher levels of student success. Like the Navo and Navo partnership model, this partnership resulted in creating an internal collaborative culture in which people viewed one another as partners on the school enhancement/improvement journey. The research data they present indicates that activities initiated through the partnership resulted in a significant change in school culture, improved student performance, and increased overall teacher satisfaction.

The fourth chapter, written by Erin Anderson and Susan Korach describes a partnership initiated by a school district to foster the success of schools in a large urban district. The partnership was built upon a long-term partnership between the district and university in the preparation of school leaders. The initiative involves working with leaders in 12 underperforming schools in need of support. The initiative was built on the premise, backed by research, that the principal is among the most critical elements in the success of the school. Although traditionally, higher education faculty provide professional development experiences for school leaders, what makes this initiative unique is that it involves not merely professional development experiences, but instead engages school leaders in continuous improvement cycles focused on "context-specific improvement" for EACH school. Additionally, rather than being designed by university personnel, members of the school district were partners in the planning process, making it a coconstructed, collaborative partnership approach. The authors present an extensive investigation into the impact of the improvement efforts and the elements that served to hinder and support their efforts.

The next five chapters of the book present partnerships initiated by the university. The first in this group, written by Andrea Kent and Joel Lewis Billingsley, describes a school/university partnership developed as an outgrowth of a long-term process in which the university faculty engaged in a self-analysis over five years. This reflection resulted in a long-term plan for faculty to enhance their cultural understanding of the students the district was serving; enhance their ability to teach about issues of diversity in their classes so they could better educate their students; and to enhance their ability and those of their graduates to be more effective in working with schools with populations whose ethnicity differed from their own. With these goals in mind, the college administrators and faculty met with members of the school district, with which they had a longstanding partnership and identified a school to partner with that would enhance the cultural understanding and expertise of the university faculty and college students, while also addressing the needs of the school. The authors engage in *appreciative inquiry*—looking at what makes things work well to analyze the partnership operations and value.

In the next chapter, Haley Sigler and Eric Moffa describe an initiative developed by the university which, like the one shared by Kent and Billingsley was designed to enhance the school and the university and was built upon a longstanding relationship with the local schools. A unique feature of this partnership is that it involves more than one university, establishing another level of collaboration to the mix. The partnership places college student leaders in internship positions in high poverty local and rural schools to work on needs determined by the school administrator.

University personnel select and place interns who then work in and with the school to determine how to deal with these issues. The interns then recruit other university interns to work in the school and help solve the identified problems. The schools and students in them have been able to solve many problems because of the support they receive from the interns and other university students. Those students, in turn, gain real-world experiences and an understanding of their responsibilities to serve. The authors present their research on what made this partnership successful and elements that hindered its success.

The next chapter written by Christopher Parfitt and Amanda Rose describes a partnership which grew from another longstanding partnership activated through a College of Education Advisory Council. This Council, comprised of district representatives, university faculty and students aid the college in program design and delivery and in determining ways in which they can work together to improve and enhance university preparation programs and school success. This Council engaged in discussions about the struggles of alternatively certified teachers. The group decided to join in partnership to conduct a research study of the issues involved so they could work together to resolve the problem. The authors present the strategies used to gather information and the findings of their investigation. This initiative was poised to benefit the university, which prepares school leaders and assists in some alternative teacher preparation and professional development and the school systems which hire these teachers and engage in providing support and professional development for them.

Robert Feirsen and Van Vlerah describe a partnership endeavor between college student advisors and high school counselors that seeks to foster student college success and expand the percentage of minority and low-income students attending and succeeding in college. Like some of the previous partnerships, this collaboration was an outgrowth of a well-established partnership between college presidents and school district superintendents of 15 colleges and universities. The authors present a conceptual framework upon which partnership activities were built. They also describe the broad array of strategies that were used to gather and report the data about the issues involved and to develop a plan to address them based on their findings. Among these were a literature review, surveys, interviews, and quantitative data analysis of student data. The authors also provide an extensive review of lessons learned. This chapter provides a comprehensive model for addressing any educational issue through partnership and should be of value to all interested in partnership development for student and school success.

The last partnership chapter, written by Sean Forbes and Carey Andrejewski takes the concept of partnership out into the broader community. The partnership, titled *O Grows* is a school-university partnership based in rural

Alabama which focuses on food security in the community through the development of school-based gardens. The partnership also has the goal of enabling a student to gain knowledge and skills about gardening that they can apply in their home settings. The partnership began as a mutually beneficial arrangement in which the school system was providing settings for teacher education candidates to fulfill their obligations to provide service to the community by aiding in activities such as after-school programs and tutoring of school-level students. The authors state the partnership mission "has necessarily been an iterative, and at times seemingly circuitous, path calling us to (re)gain access, (re)recognize benefits, and (re)navigate challenges." They use a unique analysis approach of their partnership using a model of collaboration developed by Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2005). The chapter should be of particular value to those interested in implementing change within the community and those interested in applying this analysis strategy to their partnerships.

The final chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the findings across all the chapters. The editors engaged in an extensive content analysis across all the chapters to address the following research questions:

1. What were the primary elements/factors that fostered partnership success?
2. What were the primary elements/factors that hindered partnership success?
3. What were the most significant lessons learned?
4. What are the additional research questions/issues that must be addressed?

We believe that the answers to these research questions will create a firm foundation for practitioners to develop successful partnership models and endeavors across a broad range of content areas, for many diverse purposes, in broad and varied contexts. We also expect the results to lead to more extensive and comprehensive studies on school partnerships that will contribute additional knowledge to this vital area of educational engagement and the development of a conceptual framework for partnership development and assessment.

REFERENCES

Barnett, B. G., Hall, G. E., Berg, J. H., & Camerena, M. M. (2010). A typology of partnerships for promoting innovation. *Journal of School Leadership, 20*(1), 10–36.

Clutterbuck, D. (2012). Understanding diversity mentoring. In D. Clutterbuck, K. M. Poulsen, & F. Kochan (Ed.), *Developing successful diversity mentoring programmes: An international casebook.* Open University Press.

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *76*(9), 703–707.

Epstein, J. L (2010). Teamwork is the key: The National Network of Partnership Schools. *National Civic Review, 99*(2), 21–29.

Graham, D. (2011) Family-school partnerships: Towards sustainable pedagogical practice. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *39*(2), 165–176.

Griggs, D. M. (2015). *A case study of a career academy: Toward a conceptual framework of school-industry partnerships* (Doctoral dissertation). Auburn University, Alabama. http://hdl.handle.net/10415/4498

Grobe, T. (1990). *Synthesis of existing knowledge and practice in the field of educational partnerships*. Brandeis University, The Center for Human Resources.

Holmes Partnership. (2006). *History and work, 2006.* Retrieved September 19, 2008, from http://www.holmespartnership.org/history.html

Hudson, R. (2016). *Creating university/K12 partnerships for the enhancement of educational leadership preparation and increasing student achievement: Sustainability factors, barriers, and benefits* (Doctoral dissertation). Auburn University, Alabama. http://hdl.handle.net/10415/5166

Kochan, F. (1999). Professional development schools: Examining the big picture. In D. Byrd & D. McIntyre (Eds.), *Research on professional development school's teacher education yearbook VII* (pp. 173–190). Corwin Press.

McConchie, R. (2004). *Family school partnerships* (Issues Paper). Australian Council of State School Organisations.

Mendels, P (Ed.). (2016). *Improving university principal preparation programs: Five themes from the field.* The Wallace Foundation.

Orr, M. T., King, C., & Lapointe, M. (2010). *Districts developing leaders: Lesson on consumer actions and program approaches from eight urban districts.* Education Development Center.

Ramos-Diaz, M. L, Janis, M. B. H. B, Strom, H. M., Howlett, B., Renker, A. M., & Washines, D. E. (2020). Roots to wings—A transformative co-mentoring program to foster cross-cultural understanding and pathways into the medical profession for Native and Mexican American students. In B. J. Irby, J. Boswell, L. Searby, F. Kochan, & R. Garza (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell international handbook of mentoring: Paradigms, practices, programs, and possibilities*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Reames, E. H., & Kochan, F. (2015). Examining the status of partnerships in university educational leadership doctoral programs. *International Journal of Educational Research (IJER), 24*(3), 233.

Smallwood, D. (1987, February-March). Business adopts a new approach to city's schools. *Dollars and Sense*, 12.

Soutullo, O. R., Sanders-Smith, S. C., & Smith-Bonahue, T. M. (2019). School psychology interns' characterizations of family-school partnerships. *Psychology in the Schools*, *56*(2), 690–701.

Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Harper, G. W., & Lewis, R. (2005). An interactive and contextual model of community-university collaborations for research and action. *Health Education & Behavior, 32*(1), 84–101.

Tell, C. (1999) Renewing the profession of teaching: A conversation with John Goodlad. *Educational Leadership, 56*(8) 14–20.

Woyshner, C., & Cucchiara, M. (2017). Can parent/teacher groups work for all students? *Educational Leadership,75*(1), 64–69.

CHAPTER 2

A CASE STUDY OF A SCHOOL-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP

Findings, Lessons Learned, and Suggestions for Practice

Dana M. Griggs
Southeastern Louisana University

This chapter describes a school-industry partnership that provides authentic learning for students. The purpose of the partnership was to prepare students for college and career. The facilitating factors for this partnership were identified. Six facilitators were identified (a) Open, and regular communication, (b) commitment, (c) shared values and common goals, (d) trust, (e) purposeful planning and flexibility in implementation, and (f) leadership. The method of inquiry was a qualitative case study. The school is a high school in a rural setting in Alabama, and its local power company was the industry. The partnership studied valued the time and experiences of the business partners, that is, the human capital, and sought this over monetary donations. The industry partners contributed much of both over the two-year period that was studied and continues to mentor and work with the students and teachers six years later.

INTRODUCTION

Educators have long realized the importance of educational partnerships that bring additional resources to schools. Barnett et al. (2010) reported that partnerships are ubiquitous in education, but no two are the same. This chapter reports on a unique high school-industry partnership in a rural setting in Alabama that began in 2012 and is still operating successfully. The mission of the educational partnership is to focus on providing opportunities to better prepare high school students for college, career, and life. Six facilitating elements were identified by participants that positively impact the partnership's success. The focus of this chapter is on the elements that facilitated the success and sustainability of the school-industry partnership.

This chapter is organized into five sections. A literature review that builds the case for partnerships for student success follows this introduction. The next section provides background details on partnership development, structure, and operation. This is followed by a presentation of the research question and the methods used to implement the study. The next section presents the findings of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the lessons learned through this school-industry partnership, which includes the conclusion.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Educational partnerships have been a well-documented part of U.S. history (Griggs, 2015). Grobe et al. (1990) noted that in the late 1800s, as the economy moved from manufacturing to service, businesses acknowledged a lack in preparation of entry-level employees and a need to partner with K–12 education in order to recruit and prepare the future workforce. Decades ago, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) one of the most widely read and accepted critiques of U.S. education credibly articulated the need for educational reform. This report claimed that public support through avenues such as partnerships was the greatest resource available to influence the quality of education (Burke, 1986). As a result, business-education partnerships began to explode in number as the industry realized the need to regain a vested interest in preparing its future workforce (Grobe et al., 1990). The mid-1900s brought public relations concerns that prompted businesses to provide financial and equipment donations to local schools (Barnett et al., 2010). The same outcomes make the creation of school/business partnerships a vital element in school reform today. In addition to local school/business partnerships in the United States, there has been an increase in global partnerships to connect and inform children about each other in the partnering schools,

and some global partnerships form to improve education in certain regions around the world (https://www.globalpartnership.org/).

In recent years, the need to form school/business partnerships seems to have gained additional attention because of their potential to impact the educational system and the workforce. Dealing with the issue of preparation for life and the world as it exists today, Miller (2002) called the American education system "inefficient, uneconomical, and out of date" (p. 4). Miller wrote that America's secondary education is inefficient because workforce trends and needs are largely disregarded; uneconomical because money is poured into a one size fits all college preparatory system; and out of date because graduates lack important math, literacy, and essential skills (or soft skills). Essential skills refer to employability skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, integrity, and work ethic.. that the workforce often finds weak or missing in entry-level employees. Miller called for a reform where students learn through the application of a skill that is relevant to what they will do in the future, whether 4-year university, 2-year college, or work.

Some research findings suggest that vocational career education abroad has caused other countries to surpass the U.S. due to the overemphasis in U.S. schools to prepare graduates to attend 4-year colleges (Symonds, 2012). Additionally, Symonds (2012) stressed the importance of teens and young adults obtaining the skills, both academic and work-related, required to succeed in life beyond high school whether or not they attend the university upon graduation. He postulated that students who graduate from U.S. high schools had not developed the skills needed for the workforce. Symonds et al. (2011) argued that the United States must adopt a multiple-pathway approach to educating its youth as other countries have done. Symond (2012) suggested that most U.S. students are narrowly experiencing career education, while students in other countries such as Australia, Germany, and Switzerland are being immersed. These and other researchers have explored the need to assimilate job preparation more deeply into American high schools and to act on the idea that every student should be college or career ready upon graduation. Many educational entities claim that it will take strong, collaborative school/business partnerships to provide relevant workforce application of knowledge and critical skills needed for college success (Griffith & Wade, 2002; Griggs, 2015; Symonds et al., 2011).

The Partnership and the Context

The partnership that grew between the high school in a rural school system in Alabama and a local branch of the power company was the case in this research. The high school of 741 students had begun the transition from

a traditional high school to one with college and career academies. The new business academy was the context of the partnership. The partnership was formed to support the mission of the school, which is to prepare students for college, career, and life while also preparing the future workforce. The school-industry partnership provided knowledgeable businessmen and women to work with the students and teachers in the classrooms and to mentor them through real-world situations. The partnership emphasized employability skills and provided opportunities for the students to experience real-world situations with mentors to guide them through making the right decisions for the right reasons. A few examples of the learning interactions that occurred within the partnership included (a) leaders from both industry and education modeling leadership characteristics and discussing leadership with students; (b) office ladies providing instruction on how they use Excel in their day-to-day work; (c) marketing specialists providing lessons for students on how to market their projects; (d) the human resources coordinator discussing hiring and firing procedures, company expectations, and scheduling a yearly mock interview with a panel; and (e) industry engineers working with students on projects and with groups preparing for competitions. The face-to-face interactions reoccur each time the classes and the lessons in which they are written are taught.

A favorite event that occurs two times each year is the "Networking Luncheon." Before the big event, two or three employees from the human resources department spend the day going into different classes teaching etiquettes and practicing how to handle situations using cookies and punch. A Google document is created by students where they can post additional questions as they think of them, and the human resources employees can provide answers before the luncheon.

Between 30 and 40 industry employees from the region, local business leaders, and school system personnel, along with business academy teachers and students meet in a local restaurant or large meeting area to practice pre-meal networking, conversation, and etiquettes during a three-course meal. A teacher commented, "I wonder how large the luncheon will become. It is the one thing that we do every year that I get calls from business people who want to take part in the event."

Throughout the luncheon event, the adults talk with the students and observe them interacting with other adults and students. Once the students load the buses and go back to school, the adults use a rubric to grade the five students that sit at their tables on dress, table manners, and conversation/communication. The rubrics and comments are collected and returned to the primary teachers. The students learn through this activity, and by their second year of attendance, they become pros at networking.

One employee commented that the students are sometimes a little nervous in the beginning, but they relax into the conversations and leave

with confidence and polish. A student was asked what he learned at his first networking luncheon. He smiled and said, "I learned to eat." He continued by stating, "I learned to use more than just one fork. I learned how to act, how to have small talk, and not to talk when my mouth is full. I am seventeen and never had such lessons." He then smiled and shared, "I taught my mom and sister everything that I learned before and during the luncheon. Now we practice it together at home. My sister will be ready to do it when she gets to high school." When the business office manager was told about this conversation, he stated, "That is why we are so invested in this partnership. Sure, we want to help prepare students for the workforce, but we value being able to help the families in our community. In a small way, we made a difference for this family."

In the six years that this partnership has been helping students, there have been many such stories. Students are learning from people in the real world. They are practicing their knowledge from the classroom with people in real situations. The employees report that they learn something every time that they enter the school and work with the students. They say that they get to be the teacher when they step into the classroom, which helps them to be more confident in their job performance, and they get to see their work and practices from different viewpoints which strengthen the work they do and the decisions they make. Teachers and business partners stated that this partnership is a win-win situation for adults and students, for the industry and school.

Important to note is that the partnership studied valued the time and experiences of the business partners, that is, the human capital, and sought this over monetary donations. The time that the volunteers give to the relationships and activities within the partnership is seen as invaluable by the teachers and students. The company employees act as mentors whenever they interact with the students. They encourage, discuss, and model work ethics, responsibility, excellent communication skills, and commitment to the partnership each time they visit the school or host an event. These regular interactions with leaders and effective employability skills, along with purposeful lessons and opportunities for leadership, contributed to the strength in leadership developed through this academy, especially in the students and teachers.

The business partners, teachers, and leaders expected students to meet and greet them each day as adults do in the business world. So, students would rise to their feet, shake hands with the visitor, and (re)introduce themselves. Students began doing this in the hallways and at ballgames to all adults that they met. As time passed, parents began to comment that their children were doing it off campus when they were together.

The program director stated that the opportunities provided to the students such as writing grants for city government entities, the yearly mock

interviews that representatives from her company lead, clubs, attainment of business certifications, and participation in competitions, all strengthen the students self-identity and leadership abilities. A visiting employee said, "I have never seen teenagers act so responsibly as the business academy students." A local businessman who participates in the mock interview each year and every networking luncheon commented, "The students in this academy are mature acting and easily communicate with adults. They gain much real-world experience through this partnership."

PURPOSE AND METHODS

This chapter reports on one part of a more extensive study that looked at a broad range of topics related to this partnership. The primary purpose of this portion of the study was to examine factors that facilitated the success of the partnership between a high school and a local branch of an industry that spans four states. The research question was: What elements served to facilitate the creation and implementation of the partnership?

Methodology

Creswell (2007) suggests that a case study is an appropriate model to use when one seeks to understand the context of a phenomenon in its natural setting. Thus, a case study design was used to detail the planning and year one implementation of the educational partnership. The researcher was able to construct a detailed representation of the partnership through the participants' insights, stories, and interactions with one another throughout the implementation year. A variety of data (i.e., formal interview transcripts, informal discussion notes, original documents, meeting minutes, and observational data) were collected then triangulated between a variety of sources (i.e., students, teachers, business partners, and administrators). The triangulation of a variety of data sources and methods also provided contextual credibility (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection

Primary data were obtained from (a) interviews with key participants including school administration and business partners; (b) observations of interactions between business partners and students, business partners and teachers, and students and teachers; (c) original documents obtained from the school system that were created as part of the academy evaluation, that is, minutes of planning meetings, scheduling emails, interviews of teachers and student focus groups, reflection forms, advertisement and

recruitment brochures, and other correspondence between business and educational partners. Secondary data were derived from curriculum and syllabus documents, books on the company's history, brochures, and teaching materials.

Student focus groups occurred at the beginning, middle, and end of the implementation year. The lead teacher matched students to the sample protocol and then set up the interview schedule. The students were not required to participate but chose to do so as the student's voice was valued in the school's learning communities. Student representatives met with teachers and administrators regularly to plan academy events, to speak out on issues affecting the student body, to work on continuous improvement, and to improve programs or the partnership. Mitra (2007) found that students hold distinct awareness about their school that neither the teachers nor administrators can fully replicate. The interview transcripts collected for the academy evaluation were requested for this study's review of data. The transcripts were devoid of all student identifiers when reviewed and used by the researcher.

Class discussions occurred regularly to check the progress made in the academy and the influence of the partnership on students and teachers. Notes that were taken during these informal discussions between students, teachers, or central office personnel were obtained. A teacher ensured that names or other identifiers were removed before turning over to the researcher as data for this research.

The researcher made observations throughout the year, which contributed to the rich detail that became part of the study. Creswell (2007) found that validation of qualitative research was made through extensive time in the field, thick description, and the closeness and familiarity of the researcher to study participants. The researcher was an observer and participant throughout the year-long implementation of the partnership. The qualitative, participant researcher, was not perceived as an outsider and was able to corroborate different perceptions or discover discrepancies between what participants said and did through their observed actions and multiple sources of data (Best & Kahn, 2005; Creswell, 2007).

Purposeful sampling was used to select the study population. Creswell (2007) defined purposeful sampling as selecting individuals who can purposefully inform the understanding of the case being studied. Academy participants included in the population:

- 110 Academy Students
- 8 Academy Teachers
- 1 School Administrator
- 2 System Administrators