The Daniels Fund, founded in 1997 through the generous legacy of cable entrepreneur Bill Daniels, is the largest foundation in the Rocky Mountain region. The Fund operates the Daniels Fund Grants Program and the Daniels Fund Scholarship Program in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. Each year, 70 percent of the Fund’s community investments are made through the Daniels Fund Grants Program in the following areas: Aging, Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, Amateur Sports, Disabilities, Education, Homeless and Disadvantaged, and Youth Development.

The Daniels Fund Scholarship Program consists of the Daniels Scholarship and the Daniels Opportunity Scholarship. For information, visit www.danielsfund.org.

The sense of urgency to turn around low-performing schools and ensure all students achieve at high levels has never been greater. The federal law, No Child Left Behind, requires all students to be proficient in reading and math by 2014. Increasingly, businesses and other partners are stepping up to help. Some have “adopted” an entire school or classroom, providing generous financial and human resources on an ongoing basis. Others have donated school supplies or completed one-time community service projects at the school. What is significant about the contributions of these businesses is their emphasis on helping students learn. The stakes are high. These students are their future work force.

A partnership between a school and a business can prove beneficial to both partners if the right components are in place. The Daniels Fund has researched why some school partnerships are more effective than others. This report highlights seven strategies for successful partnerships based on the findings. Researchers reviewed more than 40 Web sites; interviewed nearly 40 educators, business leaders and partnership experts; and conducted focus groups of principals, business representatives and district stakeholders in Denver, Colorado, where the Daniels Fund is headquartered.

School-Business Partnerships: What Works? offers educators, business leaders and administrators practical advice about creating successful and lasting school-business partnerships to improve schools and increase student achievement.

School-Business Partnerships: Seven Strategies for Success

School-business partnerships have been flourishing for more than 30 years. Since the 1970s, partnership programs have evolved from one-sided “Adopt-a-School” efforts to mutually beneficial partnerships that provide advantages to both schools and businesses. Partnerships offer business leaders and their employees an opportunity to contribute to their community as well as an inside look at today’s schools, which in turn increases their knowledge, understanding and advocacy for public education. Schools and students benefit from additional human and financial resources.

Effective programs share common characteristics whether they are in Los Angeles; Denver; or Granite, Utah. These common characteristics are reflected in seven strategies identified by research commissioned by the Daniels Fund.

The business community cares more than ever before about assuring that every youngster has access to a first-rate education.”

– Milt Goldberg, author of the Edutopia magazine article “Supporting Good Schools is Good Business”
When the law firm of Hogan & Hartson in Denver identified public education as its top volunteer priority, nearly Cheltenham Elementary seemed like the perfect match. The school has high poverty rates, low academic performance and a student population that is largely made up of English language learners. The partners prioritized the school's needs with a well-liked reading program that was on the budget chopping block. The firm even paid to fly in a literacy consultant to train staff.

Both partners also wanted to make sure they didn’t take on too much, too soon. “We feared we would complicate the school and kids at the firm,” says attorney David Scott. Hogan & Hartson provided literacy tutors and pledged $10,000 to the school to help fund a well-loved reading program that was on the budget chopping block. The firm even paid to fly in a literacy consultant to train staff.

Training the partners was critical, says assistant principal Don Dunphy. “Not all of the attorneys were familiar with kids. We take it for granted that being with a child is an easy thing. Training helped to alleviate their fears.”

The principal talked with staff about the proposed partnership and secured their commitment from the start.

The Cheltenham Elementary and Hogan & Hartson partnership advances the school’s push to improve students’ literacy skills.

What Worked:

- Volunteers from the law firm received training to help students build literacy skills.
- The firm and the school narrowed their priorities from the outset to ensure the firm’s volunteers and school staff didn’t take on too much.

Often a structure is put in place to help coordinate and support school-business partnerships. Typically, the program is a joint effort between the school district and the chamber of commerce. Most large school districts and some chambers of commerce have a central staff person who oversees the partnership program. The program may be housed in the district’s public relations department or its non-profit foundation.

Leaders of each school and business also are encouraged to assign a program coordinator for the partnership. These coordinators are essential to ensure ongoing communication and problem solving. A site coordinator at a school might be an assistant principal, teacher or counselor.

Depending on the size of the business, the coordinator might be the company’s owner, a midlevel employee or a representative from the business’ community relations or grants department.
Experts advise schools to look for companies that can help meet the needs of students, and companies should explore schools that are a good fit for their assistance and resources. District leaders overseeing partnership programs are encouraged to conduct research on local businesses and schools, and to use the information to make strategic matches. For example, a community college might offer classes at a technical school that provides the college’s future student base. A high-tech business may have a keen interest in tutoring students in math and science because the students are its future workforce.

Once schools and businesses understand it can’t be a one-way relationship, they develop much deeper and more meaningful partnerships,” says Linda Glidewell, former deputy superintendent of Goyder Evans School District 6 in Colorado.

After an inventory is conducted of schools’ needs, partners can be recruited through civic organizations such as Rotary and Kiwanis, parents and staff in the school, local businesses and non-profit organizations, and the faith community.

Once strategic matches are made, partners are eager to know how they can help. Strong support was voiced among business leaders overseeing partnership programs to a program kickoff event. Each leader who attended received a brochure and a packet, and the governor spoke about the reasons for the partnership program. By the end of the event, more than 100 businesses signed up to form partnerships.

Types of Partnerships

The Annapolis, Maryland, Symphony Orchestra Adopt-a-School program puts professional musicians in string music classes monthly to develop students’ skills and encourage participation in the string program. The program culminates in an annual Side by Side Concert, where the students perform with professional musicians.

The State of Virginia Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools (PASS) has tiered levels of options, based on the partnerships’ needs and the corporation’s goals. These include direct financial support; in-kind donations; support from employee volunteers for one-time events; and regular, ongoing business involvement with students and staff.

Leaders of partnership programs across the country say that success hinges on clear expectations for schools and businesses. Partners work more effectively when expectations are agreed upon upfront. Defining roles and responsibilities, goals and measurements of success helps minimize problems that could materialize later due to lack of clarity.

District leaders providing partners with a menu of options from which they could pick and choose. The more variety, the better.

“Some businesses want hands-on involvement. Others want to give support that’s specific to programs or initiatives,” says Happy Haynes, assistant to Denver Public Schools superintendent for community partnerships.

A menu also keeps the focus on student achievement and may be grouped into topic areas such as mentoring at-risk students, one-on-one tutoring, job shadowing or apprenticeships, enrichment activities like guest lectures or field trips, and teacher and student recognition.

Some programs have tiered levels of options, based on the students’ needs and the business’ needs and ability to participate. Large corporations may want to participate differently than small businesses. Options might include direct financial support; in-kind donations; support from employee volunteers for one-time events; and regular, ongoing business involvement with students and staff.

“An ideal partnership is defined by clear goals and measurable outcomes, and implemented – with the support from top school and business leadership – to become a part of virtually every school and business day.”

-- Guiding Principles for School and Business Partnerships, Council for Corporate and School Partnerships
Programs in large school districts offer annual or ongoing training for school and business partnership coordinators as well as volunteers. In addition, schools are encouraged to hold a school-based introductory meeting with the partner where information about the school and business is shared. Lack of training for school staff and volunteers can hinder a promising partnership.

Volunteer training may include:
- Annual districtwide kickoff event where school and business teams receive general training, then break into groups to discuss their specific plans for the year
- School-based orientation meeting with program leaders to review needs, set annual goals and establish annual plan of activities
- School- or district-based orientation for every volunteer who will be in the school building, to include information about duties and responsibilities, safety and confidentiality issues
- Training on how to tutor children and the school curriculum
- Regular monthly or quarterly meetings between the school and business coordinators to assess how the partnership is going

To ensure the program’s sustainability, it’s important to have an ongoing communications plan and recognition program, including publicity to recruit new partners and honor existing ones. Coming to consensus on what type of recognition businesses will receive is significant. Developing guidelines for recognition and communicating about them to partners early on helps partners be clear about the public recognition they will receive for their efforts. The guidelines must be balanced with what is the appropriate degree of business recognition in schools. Some individuals who oversee school partner programs say while hidden agendas and commercialism in schools can be a challenge, it is typically less of a challenge than some may expect. “We talk openly about the business’ role and the school’s role, and the goals they set up probably help winnow out those with an agenda,” says Tim Tracy, former president of the Greeley-Weld County Chamber of Commerce.

“Your should develop written job descriptions. The focus is on what the job is and who is qualified to do it. You also need strategies to bring volunteers in and to keep them engaged.”

– Jackie Norris, executive director, Metro Volunteers, Denver

**Ideas for Recognizing Business Partners**

- Letters from principal, teachers, students and parents
- End-of-year celebrations
- Recognition at assemblies, on school Web sites and in school newsletter
- Annual district award for an outstanding partner
- Continuous service award to long-term partners (e.g., five years)
- Certificates, bulletin boards or banners to display at the school and business
- Annual awards luncheon for school and business partnership coordinators
- Recognition at school board meetings

**The guidelines must be balanced with what is the appropriate degree of business recognition in schools.**
CONCLUSION

Evaluation should be an integral part of the annual plan developed by the partners to determine how results will be measured. If there are clear definitions of what success will look like, it will be easier to monitor and evaluate whether the program has been successful.

Partnerships should be evaluated on a regular, agreed-upon basis and include data collection and analysis to assess strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation process must be user-friendly, meaningful and simple. For example, business and school coordinators might conduct an annual review meeting. Some programs use written surveys or pre- and post-assessment forms that can be completed by teachers, students and volunteers.

“...businesses had not asked for [evaluation] results, but that's changing. Now they are asking, ‘What are we getting out of this project? How are students benefiting?’ They have to justify it to shareholders.”

– Vivian Howell, former director of partnerships, Los Angeles Unified School District

Regularly monitor and evaluate each partnership and the overall program.

STRATEGY SEVEN

As with any new undertaking, schools and businesses will face challenges during their partnership – from considering partnerships that involve in-school advertising to cultural differences between schools and businesses to staff turnover. These challenges are not insurmountable. The Council for Corporate and School Partnerships, a national organization focusing on school-business partnerships, recommends that schools, businesses and communities make decisions about tough issues based on their mission, values and goals.

The challenges cited most often in the Daniels Fund research were:

► Turnover: New principals unfamiliar with the program may not buy in at first.
► Busy school staff: Most school liaisons are not paid, and it is sometimes hard to find a school coordinator.
► Background checks: Many school districts require volunteer screening.
► Cultural differences: Businesses expect immediate results and may be disappointed by the time involved in setting up a partnership as schools face other pressing demands.
► School staff resistance: Teachers may think the program is more trouble than it’s worth.
► Training: Schools may fail to train and use volunteers appropriately.
► Communication: Lack of open and honest communication can harm partnerships.
► Evaluation: Both business and school staffs are busy and will not buy in to complicated evaluation procedures.

When done well, school-business partnerships offer major benefits for schools, students and their partners. While partnerships are hard work and there are challenges, the benefits of a well-organized program are worth the effort. The good news: Staying focused on the seven strategies outlined in this report may lay a solid foundation for long-term, meaningful, successful partnerships.

For more information, including tools, more tips and sample practices, visit www.danielsfund.org.