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ABSTRACT

A decade ago, the business community began to pursue tentative, new relationships with schools; the focus was on long-term educational improvement, frequently targeted to core academic subjects. Now partnerships are everywhere, involving thousands of schools and hundreds of thousands of local people. This essay discusses the resources brought to schools by school-business partnerships and assesses these partnerships' magnitude and dependability. Straightforward discussion of dollars and forecasts is impossible, since most schools, districts, and business partners seem to operate with little concern for tracking the dollar figures for donated services. One estimate shows that corporate gifts through partnerships amount to less than 0.5 percent of total school expenditures. When gifts (both tax-deductible and nondeducted contributions) are considered, the amount improves, but is unlikely to increase in the future. The total pool of business giving has hovered around 1 percent of pretax net income for 40 years. Fortunately, in many cooperative transactions, no dollars change hands. Since the 1960s, a "new corporate philanthropy" has emerged that accepts a large measure of community responsibility as good business and good citizenship. Two potential benefits have emerged: (1) advocacy for increased financial support for schools; and (2) efforts to increase public confidence in schools and to link schools with the local economic development that will increase the tax base and secure greater tax support without increasing the individual tax burden. (40 endnotes) (MLH)

COMMONSENSE INVESTMENTS IN A SHARED FUTURE: BUSINESS SUPPORT OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"The New School Finance Research Agenda: Resource Utilization and School Districts"

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- To foster interstate communication and cooperation; and
- To ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.

Commonsense Investments in a Shared Future:
Business Support of Public Schools

by Maryellen J. Lewis

Introduction

It has been nearly a decade since the business community began to participate in tentative, new relationships with schools--what we now call School-Business Partnerships. It took a while for the "newness" to sink in, since the private sector has always participated in public schools, in one form or another: as advisors for vocational education, as sites for cooperative education or "career awareness" fieldtrips, as yearbook sponsors, and so on.

But in the last decade, those emerging collaborations took on a new tone. Their focus (though uneven at best) was not sharply on job skills but increasingly on a less-well-understood concept of "educational improvement," frequently targeted to core subjects such as math, science and expert literacy. And the emphasis (again, uneven at best) was on long-term commitment to moving past the flashy "quick fixes" toward shared problem solving where all partners have a compelling stake. As they say in West Virginia, these new partnerships sought to be "A Handshake, Not a Handout."[1]

Now partnerships are everywhere, involving thousands of schools and hundreds of thousands of local people. Since these collaborations sometimes involve dollars and always commit resources from both businesses and schools, many concerned persons in education and business began to wonder: How much? and, Is it dependable? What does all this enthusiasm really amount to?

These questions draw our attention especially now, during these times of limited public resources. Much like the private sector, schools and educators have been struggling to retool and strengthen their capacities to serve shifting populations of students. But flexible public funding has been scarce for supporting exploration and risk-taking in schools. Therefore, although small, the resources gained from the private sector through partnerships have proven to be rare "venture capital" for some schools, enabling creative educators to move forward (through mini-grants to teachers, for example). Collaborations have also proven to be politically valuable, gaining for some schools an informed and influential business advocacy that has resulted in successful bond issues and other supports.

In this essay I will discuss the resources brought to schools by school-business partnerships and draw together what we know about their magnitude and dependability. In particular, I will draw implications from the recent trends in corporations' charitable giving and community service, which bear directly on their commitment to the public schools. Since the newly-publicized relationship between schools and our economic stability and growth figures centrally in that corporate commitment, I will draw together recent discussion and evidence focusing particularly on local communities.

I. What is the Magnitude of Support, and Is It Dependable?

A sensible place to begin would be a straightforward discussion of dollars and forecasts. Unfortunately, such discussion still remains elusive in both policy and practice. However, I believe there is enough evidence to affirm the surrogate intuitions and hopefulness found in communities across the country.

What we have here is a moving target, and what one sees depends very much on where one looks. But about one thing there can be no doubt: there are a lot of school-business partnerships out there. In 1984--which President Reagan declared the Year of Partnerships in Education--the U.S. Department of Education reported finding over 46,000 partnerships in only 56% of the nation's school districts. A more recent survey of 500 large and 6000 small companies by the Committee for Economic Development found that half of responding large companies and 20% of small companies have programs to assist schools. At the end of last year, the publisher of ProEducation reported that the magazine's survey of schools found 70% currently operating partnerships and 90% of the remainder expressing interest.[2]

Can we determine what these partnerships mean for school budgets? Possibly. But the accounting procedures for all this activity--almost lacking or, more optimistically, now emerging--reflect the state of our consensus. A 1984 survey by the Council of Chief State School Officers concluded that programs not only lack such oversight and evaluation procedures, but also largely lack definition or even developmental supports for planning and information-sharing.[3]

Direct Evidence: How Much? A few school districts do track the donated services (especially business volunteers) and then report them annually, as do Chattanooga and St. Louis. In St. Louis, for example, the estimated value of business-donated time and materials generated by the School Partnership Program passed $270,000 in 1986-87. For the racially-isolated schools targeted, that amounted to slightly more than the principals' total annual discretionary budget from the district. (However, estimates of donated services are notoriously high. In St. Louis, figures are based on the donee's salary, computed into an hourly rate.)[4]

In addition, a great many large companies have, or are now adapting, accounting procedures for their own costs. While the Conference Board's 1974 survey found little in-kind company data and its 1980 survey found data in only 10% of companies surveyed, its more recent survey found enough data to estimate total non-deductible contributions (e.g., time and materials) totalling an additional 30% over charitable contributions. And this accounting trend seems likely to continue. By 1987, 61% of surveyed members of the life and health insurance industry had developed formal in-kind contributions, and their Center for Corporate Public Involvement targets accounting expertise as a high priority for the field.[5]

Companies that have well-developed mechanisms for community involvement--typically our largest corporations--have also had 10-15 years of experience in learning to capture costs, and that developing expertise will increasingly be applied to school partnerships. For example, General Motors determined that the basic skills modules for corporation use, developed in one year's collaboration with teachers, saved the company an estimated $277,000.[6]

On the other hand, most schools, districts and business partners seem to operate without much concern for such dollar figures. From rural districts and small towns to major metropolitan systems and across all sectors of those communities, I have rarely come across more than a passing "it would be nice" interest in documenting or tracking the resource flow (except in academe). In fact, one urban partnership director confided, "We used to do that but gave it up about five years ago. It was a waste of time." One researcher reported a similar experience in his 1984 study of partnerships in 23 American cities: 3 of 4 school superintendents were not even able to <u>guess</u> at a dollar figure for the previous year.[7]

<u>Indirect Evidence: How Much?</u> If hard numbers are so elusive, is it possible to estimate from available sources? Two analysts have done just that: Based on their own

date and familiarity with the field, they each estimated that corporate gifts to schools through partnerships amounted to less than 1/2% of the total expenditures for elementary and secondary schools, "more than schools spend yearly for furniture and equipment, but much less than they receive from various ticket sales and other miscellaneous receipts."[8]

If we limit the analysis to gifts (tax-deductible contributions to schools--cash and computers, for example), then existing data sources may shed further light. The Council on Financial Aid to Education (which regularly tracks gifts to education from all sources) recently reported that, of the estimated $4.5 billion in 1986 corporate gifts, 6.1% went to precollege education. Though small, this proportion has steadily increased in recent years, up from 5.2% in 1985. (Some aggressive leaders urge even greater increases, such as Honeywell which gave 30% of total contributions to precollege education in 1983.) If we add the most conservative estimate of nondeducted contributions (such as business-volunteered time, facilities, and the contributions reported as business expenses such as "public relations") as another 30%, the amount begins to look more significant.[9]

And there is every reason for confidence that the commitment, and therefore the contributions level, will continue to increase. For example, while a Conference Board 1983 survey of senior managers found only 43% listing public education as a primary item in their public affairs agendas, and a similar 1984 survey of executives found that only 46% felt "education should be an immediate national priority," by December 1987 that proportion was up to two-thirds. Leadership for this shift comes from many sources, reaching far into diverse business sectors but most notably among manufacturers and insurance companies. Wherever prominent business executives have become actively involved in the public schools debate, and whenever they articulate a responsible, credible business rationale on issues related to school improvement (such as international competition or new technologies in their field), they often influence other companies into local action and support.[10]

At the same time, however, there appear to be limits to this growth. We know that contributions to schools are increasing, yet the total pool of business giving remains at something more than 1% of pretax net income, where it has hovered for nearly 40 years. Although the vast majority of companies filing tax returns do not report any deductible contributions, and only 6% claimed more than $500, according to a 1985 analysis, most of these nongivers are smaller companies with more limited resources. So unless large corporate donors double or even quintuple their aggregate giving--as the corporate Two Percent and Five Percent Clubs advocate but which is unlikely in the short term--any increased donations to schools likely mean fewer deductible dollars to other worthy recipients.[11]

Fortunately, this discouraging picture does not fit very well with the small town or neighborhood views of partnerships. When a local newspaper editor gets together with an English teacher over coffee to work out a student oral history project for local publication, nobody keeps records for the IRS. When a bank president explores with the school superintendent how social studies, math and science projects could be designed with teachers around pressing community needs, no dollars change hands. The educational value of the projects and the short- and long-term economic benefits to the community seem clear enough to each partner: students will master core subjects while collaborating with local volunteers and contributing useful information for local planning and action.

And this is perhaps the way most partnerships operate: people coming together, using the resources at hand to solve mutual problems. A 1984 U.S. Department of Education survey found that small businesses comprised the largest proportion of partners

(37%). The ProEducation 1984 survey found that 80% of school partnerships involve some or mostly small, local employers. While few school systems will be the beneficiaries of a corporate endowment fund like the Boston Plan for Excellence, hundreds and hundreds of communities have established small school foundations and discretionary funds with the help of local businesses, pooling venture capital for local experimentation and creative school improvement. Further, those employers who don't get involved, as with nongivers in general, most commonly give as their reason that they weren't asked.[12]

Perhaps, then, the answer to "how much" can be found by looking more carefully at the reasons for the question. Are you an advocate seeking convincing evidence to promote partnerships among principals? Then the attractive records kept by individual companies working with individual schools might be useful (such as the Fact Sheet and packet Sara Lee Corporation produces each year on its adopted Harper High School in Chicago). Do you represent a chamber of commerce, seeking to promote partnerships to strengthen schools as part of the local economic development strategy? Better figures for you might come from collaborations that stretch a nickel beyond all imagining. And for companies like Sara Lee that are beginning to ask, "Does it make a difference?" a new kind of calculus is emerging, one which goes far beyond dollar figures and which bears directly on the future of business support for public education.

A New Calculus: Indirect Evidence of Dependability. Unlike the public sector, businesses have no explicit mandate to support public education, except through taxes. In fact the legality, let alone the propriety, of business philanthropy itself has been clarified only within living memory, and vocal doubters still remain on all sides (though they are estimated to comprise fewer than 5% of stockholders). Nonetheless, the current wave of business involvement with schools is tied into a maturing business technology for social involvement, which suggests that it will continue.[13]

The history of that business capacity is enlightening. The earliest rationales for business donations, both before and after allowed as tax deductions in 1935, were grounded in self-interest: any publicly-held firm must manage its resources for the benefit of stockholders, so any charitable donation must have clear and "direct benefit" to the firm, such as improving employee relations. Case law and received wisdom (especially among corporation lawyers and senior financial managers) defined this practice into the 1950s. Even public opinion after World War II made the careful distinction that business contributions must be related to the company's or employee's benefit. (Presumably, sole owners could contribute without outside constraints.) In 1952, a professor of law defined these limits in a manual for corporations:[14]

> The general common law rule applicable to charitable contributions is not difficult to state: such contributions are within corporate powers only when they tend directly to advance the corporate interests, either by producing a direct pecuniary benefit (e.g., attracting new customers) or by enhancing the well-being of the employees (and thus increase their efficiency and loyalty). A gift may not be made merely for the benefit of the community at large, however meritorious the purpose.

Of course, few restraints actually existed on business generosity, and the few public policy debates and court cases were often engineered by potential recipients who sought to remove distracting barriers from corporate benefactors--as did the Community Chests in the 1930s, the liberal arts colleges in the 1950s, and arts organizations and their allies in the early 1960s. In stages and over a long period of time, each of these "meritorious" causes became established recipients of a broadened corporate philanthropy of indirect benefit.[15]

While many companies were still resisting this broader definition of business concerns, the 1960s and 1970s brought dramatic changes in business charity and marked the emergence of what has been called the "new corporate philanthropy." The change took place on at least two fronts: in the changing public demands on corporate behavior, and in a slower transformation of managerial practice and tenets about the firm's place in the social order. In 1969, Peter Drucker described it as a new social contract: "a demand that business and businessmen make concern for society central to the conduct of business itself. It is a demand that the quality of life become the business of business."[16]

At the time, much of this debate centered around "corporate citizenship" and "corporate social responsibility," and it generated sincere reflection and action in many companies. However, it failed to penetrate far into the management culture. As a result, peripheral benefactions were not always well-conceived and often tended to hold low company priority in hard economic times. Doing good--while a powerful personal motivator--turned out to be an inadequate rationale for broad and sustained business commitment. As one insider concluded in 1972, "for the most part, executives still think of social responsibility as peripheral to primary corporate tasks and consequently administer it that way."[17]

Some concerned business leaders responded by trying carefully to articulate a vision of "corporate altruism": doing good for no predetermined benefit to the company. That interpretation did not gain a broad base of adherents, however, and was superceded in the business community by a much more compelling principle: "enlightened self-interest." Within this framework, the business community began systematically to integrate pressing social goals with short- and long-term business objectives.[18]

In an early version of this principle, the President of Ford Motor Company wrote in 1966 for a college business journal: "The ability of a corporation to protect and enhance the stockholder's equity depends crucially upon the prosperity, goodwill and confidence of the larger community. Acceptance of a large measure of responsibility toward the community is therefore good business as well as good citizenship." That same year, the Chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank urged business leaders, "Business must learn to look upon its social responsibilities as something inseparable from its economic functions."[19]

The translation of these compelling ideas into business behaviors took many years. A 1972 study by the Stanford Business School found that only 20% of surveyed companies reported having programs to address social problems, but that 50% more thought it was a good idea. Many companies began in the early 1970s to undertake regular "environmental analyses" to guide corporate planning. A new specialist appeared--the public affairs/external relations manager--and a few companies formed highly-visible "social responsibility committees," notably some that were experiencing intense controversy, such as General Motors and Dow Chemical. Eventually a new framework was articulated in contributions policies, as in this 1979 statement by R.J. Reynolds Industry Inc.:[20]

> Corporate contributions are business dollars; these contributions come from funds that directly or indirectly belong to stockholders. Therefore, they should be invested for businesslike objectives, rather than simply given. A carefully planned use of the stockholders' money must benefit the giver as well as the receiver.

By 1975, a survey of senior managers would find that the ubiquitous term "enlightened self-interest" ranked as the highest reported motive for corporate social involvement, and that, "generally speaking, corporate involvement in social problems is passing from the 'do whatever we can' stage ... to a more orderly approach involving long-run organizational planning and commitments." After that, surveys regularly documented this trend in managerial conviction and practice, particularly as it related to corporate philanthropy. For example, in sharp contrast to their 1972 statement that CEOs in general "regard the demands of the public sector as a moral issue ... rather than as a practical issue of what business had to do to survive and prosper in our society"--by 1982 pollsters Yankelovich, Skelly and White reported with conviction that CEOs "clearly state that the goals of their corporate giving efforts are a mixture of helping others and helping their companies." Or as one CEO put it, "I can help you with your problems because they're mine too."[21]

This new pattern of business commitment to communities is still being shaped, but it is by no means fragile. Lead companies in all sectors have increasingly professionalized, and the influence-networks among companies continue to shape and discipline "customary practice" deep into the private sector. Although such peer influence among companies tends to be much more effective among larger firms, the aggressive leadership taken in particular sectors has already had far-reaching effects on medium and smaller firms--as in the insurance field through its Center for Corporate Public Involvement, and among chambers of commerce through nationwide workshops and assistance by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States (particularly in the last ten years). Business school textbooks now address the issues directly; and afterwards, young managers often are inducted into increasingly sophisticated policies and incentive systems which guide the implementation of executive social policy into the customary practices and "rules of thumb" in the firm.[22]

"Enlightened Self-Interest" and Public Education. The current enthusiasm for school-business partnerships rides on the crest of this momentum through the business community. And unlike the scattered strategies of the 1970s--where companies were challenged to repair the environment, compensate for economic disinvestments in communities, and rebuild friendships with the citizenry--now companies are off the defensive, operating with confidence and solidarity on a publicly-recognized cause in the national interest. In contrast to a 1980 analysis in the Harvard Business Review which found an "absence of business consensus" on social issues and the "absence of effective leadership for the business community on many public policy questions ...," now businesses have found common cause in our national concern about public education and the national economy.[23]

As in any significant social change, the real momentum for this growing commitment lies not only with the highly-visible corporate leadership but, more importantly, in thousands of communities where partnerships are undertaken. Even so, the breadth and stature of the opinion leaders serve as a useful gauge and suggest the durability of this trend. For example, in 1981 the New York Stock Exchange published a report urging American business to recognize its stake in public education. Beginning in the late 1970s, the Chamber of Commerce of the United States began to disseminate through local chambers a new understanding of how schools are key to local prosperity and how chambers can help. Then in 1982, the Chamber's national office issued American Education: An Economic Issue and stepped up efforts to stimulate local chambers into local school involvement; in 1984, it followed up with Business & Education: Partners for the Future, urging "increased business involvement in a community-wide response to improve education--at all levels."[24]

That same year, the CEO who co-chaired the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth told manufacturers that "the members of the task force shared the conviction that education is key to being productive and competitive and to economic growth." In 1985, after three years of deliberation, the Committee for Economic Development released its pivotal report Investing in Our Children and embarked on a series of urban roundtables to carry the dialogue around the nation. In 1986 the National Alliance of Business began its initiative that would eventually fund replications of the jobs-upon-graduation incentive model in cities across the country.[25]

The American Council of Life Insurance and the Health Insurance Association of America in 1985 issued The Company's Stake in Education, urging companies to organize local employers into partnership efforts to assist schools; in 1987, they issued the sector's first major policy framework, which listed public education as the first priority. In its 1987 policy recommendations, the Business Roundtable urged, "The private sector should participate directly in the improvement of local schools." That same year, the Conference Board held a major conference on "The New Education Agenda for Business."[26]

All these reports and actions are buttressed by new kinds of numbers which are emerging from the newly-sophisticated corporate accounting systems. In the last ten years, for example, aggregate dollar figures for corporate education and training have appeared, as have startling figures about remedial education by employers. According to one 1985 report, for example, more than two-thirds of surveyed large companies provide routine remedial education to employees; in 1984, AT&T alone spent $6 million on literacy courses. These numbers have been taken as clear indication of the private sector's vested interest in public schools.[27]

This sense of urgency has been heard at the state and local levels as well as at the national level. In California, for example, the State Chamber of Commerce for years has mobilized chambers statewide with their Project BET: Business and Education Together, and has assisted dozens of local collaborations. Business and civic leaders in Indiana and West Virginia successfully established third-party agencies to advocate and assist local partnerships: the public Indiana Partners in Education and the nonprofit West Virginia Education Fund.

This widening private sector conviction about the long-term social and economic benefits of quality public education, in combination with its advocacy and constructive action, suggest several things about the durability and worth of school-business involvement:

(1) The interaction between reflection and action has resulted in a maturation process in many local partnerships. True, surveys consistently paint a very traditional picture of partnerships, still largely made up of such familiar activities as rewards for students, prizes for teachers, and donations of equipment, materials, trips, and classroom speakers that most often are not carefully integrated into the instructional scope and sequence. But more and more, businesses and educators are asking sensible questions, such as "Does it make a difference?" and "How can we make more cost-effective use of this rare venture capital?"[28]

Teachers especially tell me about the peripheral, often diversionary nature of partnerships. As one Michigan teacher put it, "I'm a geometry teacher. My job is to teach geometry; my job depends on it, I'm evaluated on it, and that's why I went into teaching in the first place. How can partnerships help me to teach geometry?"

But once asked, these questions can become organizing principles for grounded planning and thoughtful action. These questions can lead to curriculum-driven programs such as one I know in rural Colorado: a teacher, in cooperation with the local business association and City Council, designed his course around a community service project. His students analyzed the potential impact of the local deer-hunting industry on the depressed local economy, then helped to implement the Council's recommendations based on their findings. While that project resulted in significant change in that small town, it also energized the curriculum and motivated students. (St. Louis has also moved to ground partnerships systematically in core curricular objectives, and Boston is beginning to follow its lead.)[29]

Concerns about impact are also heard from the private sector, particularly as familiar strategies come up short. For example, when the guaranteed-job-on-graduation incentive failed even to dent the dropout rate in Boston, businesses did not withdraw, but instead, knuckled down. When Chicago's Harper High School still showed high dropout and truancy rates after nearly seven years of partnership, Sara Lee Corporation did not abandon its commitments but instead invested in rigorous school-site analysis and mutual problem-solving. As a researcher for the Conference Board said recently, "There is a concern with finding ways to use money [donated to public schools] other than in a peripheral way." These and other examples suggest that business may be a tenacious partner in our national quest for dependable ways to educate all our children.[30]

(2) Experience with partnerships also appears to result in more generous partners. Principals often tell me so, and their experience is backed up by surveys of some employers. This hypothesis is also consistent with large-scale studies of generosity among Americans: those who volunteer tend also to be donors, volunteering often leads to giving, and giving may also lead to volunteering and other support and advocacy.[31]

(3) Although the total contribution to local school budgets is likely to remain small--comparable to the slightly-increasing dollars from private foundations to schools--it holds real promise as rare flexible resources for experimentation, creative risk-taking, and for enriching the bare-bones atmosphere of many schools today. Like most grassroots movements, the responses to this opportunity are uneven or unclear, and the full range of motives and purposes is sometimes astonishing. But an increasing number of partners are finding ways to harness an emerging local consensus into courageous and far-reaching strategies for helping their children.

II. Does It Lead to a Strengthened Resource Base for Public Education?

A commitment to greater tax support has been called the "maximum payoff" from school-business partnerships. One political scientist, based on his research on urban partnerships, argues that "there are two potential benefits to the current wave of public school/private sector partnerships. One is the possibility that mutual understanding may mature into political collaboration and thus more adequate financial support for the schools.... The second benefit, corporate donations, is more direct but less significant."[32]

And, indeed, that "payoff" has been achieved in many communities and several states. In Sycamore, Illinois, for example, local industries paid for a successful advertising campaign in support of a local bond issue in 1983: "Sycamore, It's Our Home, Too. We Urge You to Vote Yes on November 3." The private sector in Cleveland undertook a similar campaign. The life and health insurance industries, among others, explicitly advocate that local employers should seek to generate "support for bond issues or tax issues for education...." Already, the study of collaboratives in twenty-three cities (cited earlier) found that half those cities had benefited from a resulting political coalition with their business community.[33]

Broad business advocacy for supporting schools has also appeared at higher policy levels. The director of public affairs at Burger King, which has actively supported schools since 1983, reports that the corporation is now seeking ways to "use the credibility and allies we have gained to press for educational reform in the legislative arena on such issues as higher teacher salaries, more effective use of funds already available, and support of worthwhile programs." William S. Woodside of Primerica Corporation has long spoken eloquently of the corporate stake in education and urges: "We should be campaigning every day for greater public resources for public schools, as if our collective future depended upon it--because it does." Already, he and others have advocated increased education funding at the federal level. And as visible business leaders succeed in articulating a convincing case for business support--citing dangerous international competition and complex new technologies, for example--many others respond by joining in local action for schools they know.[34]

Obviously, there are reasons for caution about business taking aggressive leadership in matters of public policy, particularly the education of our children. As one commission expressed it, we may need to question "management's power to allocate society's resources among such institutions or activities for which they have no mandate from, nor any obligation of formal responsibility to the general public." But the increasing sophistication among education leaders and practitioners, along with the mutual learning and respect commonly resulting from partnerships, promises to balance that weighty influence, at least in local communities.[35]

Even so, direct political advocacy may be too limited a measure for successful school-business collaboration. I am aware of at least two other explicit strategies underlying partnerships which may turn out to have even more lasting impact: efforts to augment public confidence in schools and efforts to link schools with the local economic development that will increase the tax base and thus secure greater tax support for schools without increasing the individual tax burden.

Increasing public confidence in schools, or "constituency building in support of the public schools," was a primary goal of a five-year Ford Foundation project, the Public Education Fund, which stimulated the creation of local school foundations in cities across the country. These local agencies pool local business and other philanthropic dollars and then channel them into innovative school projects, such as teacher mini-grants. The primary aim of many, such as the Los Angeles Educational Partnership, is "rebuilding community confidence and support for public education."[36]

To be sure, rebuilding public confidence is no easy matter. Although public relations is a common ingredient in school foundations and other school-business collaborations, participants also usually recognize that publicity and communications alone will not change a "bad rep." In a 1984 analysis of public confidence in schools, researchers point out that "an individual's confidence in schools is affected by a wide range of images that flow through one's experiences over time," and that public confidence is merely "an aggregate of individual citizen judgements...." They conclude,

> In summary, these respondents have confidence in schools and school districts when buildings are well-maintained with bright, clean interiors; when there are committed, competent, and caring educators; when quality education is offered; when there is good discipline in a safe environment; when schools contain achievement-oriented staffs, have involved parents, and offer a selection of optional programs and activities to meet special needs and enhance the growth of all students.... Community perception of good schools seems not to have changed much over decades.[37]

Some schools, especially urban schools, lack these reassuring ingredients. And public relations alone will not fix that. Yet projects that get local employers and others directly involved, working side-by-side with professional educators to tackle stubborn issues, seem to be making a difference in even those troubled systems.

In Chicago, for example, companies working with individual schools often become committed for the long term. Their work in schools and with school staffs confronts them with the realities of urban classrooms today, and they see at close hand the efforts by their school partners to respond. Although their judgements about systemic problems remain stern, their optimism and confidence about their own school partners seem equally unswerving. Over time, their confidence is shaped not by awards ceremonies or flashy press releases, but by the steady haul toward licking tough problems. In just this way, as one national assessment concluded, partnerships "create an educated, influential constituency for public education."[38]

Linking Schools with Local Economic Development. During the last ten years, some chambers of commerce confirmed that quality of schools plays a vital role in the relocation and expansion of businesses. A 1979 survey by the Conference Board concluded also that schools are key in corporate locational decisions. For some states, such as Indiana, the concern is that we "recognize the magnet an educated citizenry provides in attracting business." For others, such as Nebraska, Montana, and Iowa, the biggest worry may be "how to stop the drain of bright young people and retain them locally as entrepreneurs instead."[39]

Two economic reports recently acknowledged the emergence of public education as a major factor in a state's economic well-being. The 1988 report of the Corporation for Enterprise Development, for example, concluded that:

> For the competitors in this new economy, the determinants of the economic climate in a state are very different than they once were. For example, within reasonable limits it's not how high taxes are that's important, but what value you get for them--in schools, highways, quality of life and public safety. Within reasonable limits, it's not how high wages are, but whether the productivity of the workforce is worth the wages it gets paid--whether it has the kind of adaptable skills needed in businesses where the tasks may change every few weeks, or even daily.

Similarly, the recent Grant Thornton survey of business climate in forty-eight states documents the emergence of schools as a key element:

> While wages and unionization are top priorities, today's manufacturers face a complex environment where the formula for success includes other elements in addition to operating costs. They must also consider a number of increasingly important factors--a skilled workforce, business incentives, and quality education among them. All contribute to a healthy business environment which, in turn, shapes a region's manufacturing climate.... A region's quality of life--education, health care, cost of living, and transportation--contributes to its economic well-being. This can determine whether a region is perceived as a good or bad place to do business. In particular, there is a growing concern about [precollege] education; manufacturers said it was the sixth most important factor [of 21] in the study. [Ranked third was "availability of a qualified workforce."]

It would be too easy to oversimplify the relationship between schools and local economic well-being. Nonetheless, some groundwork has been laid here for a kind of collaboration that goes beyond election day. As reported to the National Council for Urban Economic Development, the trends in economic development are unambiguous: "Just as the three most important factors in the sale of real estate are said to be location, location, and location, the highest priorities of economic development in the future are likely to be education, education, and education."[40]

But how can this unfamiliar concept be translated into concrete support for schools? That became a central question for the Colorado Partnership Project which I directed, under the leadership of Commissioner Calvin Frazier and Assistant Commissioner Arvin C. Blome. Whether in depressed rural communities, in communities experiencing major economic dislocations such as a plant closing, or in communities already organizing for economic expansion, the Partnership Project sought to identify and assist linkages that would serve those economic agendas <u>while strengthening teaching and learning in the local schools</u>.

These are some of the remarkable ways that local visionaries conceived to link the abstract concepts of economic development and school improvement:

(1) A local chamber of commerce proposed a project that links schools with strategies to augment the tourist industry as a 'bridge' economy during long-term economic development. For example, geometry students, under the supervision of the local Forest Service agent, would map out the cross-country ski trails on public land; the geometry teacher would use the collected measurements to teach geometry, and the chamber would distribute the map (with all the students' names on it) to tourists and in the new promotional portfolio. Since statewide data indicate that 2 of every 3 residents first came

as tourists, the map would publicize to potential residents the quality of the schools. And since companies have similar concerns, the map would serve to demonstrate community solidarity for educating its young people.

(2) A local economic development commission conceived a plan where science students will study the local mine-tailings problem, then publicize their findings and conduct community forums. The issue has been identified as a key barrier to business and individual relocation there, so students will contribute by using their new knowledge to mobilize community understanding and action.

(3) A local banker who headed the economic development commission saw ways that students could help gather local information for the new computerized data base for community planning: for example, by conducting traffic-flow surveys and interviewing shopkeepers about year-round tourist patterns and common marketing needs. In this way, students would not only learn about basic academic concepts but also pool new information for a community-wide agenda and generate broader understanding among many adults.

(4) Based on the initiative by a small chamber in rural California, several chambers and civic groups in Colorado designed projects to incorporate students in local history research. For example, English students would conduct oral histories, search through family and business records, and prepare a series of vignettes for a town's first portfolio to send out to prospective employers.

(5) A graphic arts class would take on start-up projects for new businesses (such as logos or poster design) in cooperation with the chamber's campaign to attract small businesses to the town.

In these ways, educators and students can help to strengthen the local tax base at the same time that they augment the teaching and learning process. And in depressed urban neighborhoods, the opportunities for linking school improvement with local economic development are just as great as in these small and rural communities.

III. Conclusion

School-business collaboration now has a history, and I for one am cautiously optimistic about its future promise. Although the uncertain dollar figures (cash and in-kind) remain small, they can represent significant "venture capital" for educators struggling to rethink and redesign school programs with scarce public dollars.

I also am convinced that a more significant transformation has taken place than simply the emergence of a new source of revenue for schools. The private sector has made gestures--both symbolic and substantial--that have created greater awareness, cooperation and involvement across institutional boundaries. In some courageous partnerships, schools have reached beyond their borders in remarkably creative ways, even in communities with long histories of disjunction. The challenge now is for communities to build on these new commitments and to put in place mechanisms and public dialogue that will sustain and enrich them.

When considered against the larger trends in business social involvement during recent decades, it becomes clear that private sector support of schools is not the fragile "window of opportunity" that many fear. On the contrary, it is likely to be resilient, increasingly sophisticated and rigorous. A new attitude has emerged in the private sector, one which parallels the nation's renewed commitment to quality public education for every child. That new attitude represents opportunity--not just for grand educational policies and action on a national scale, but also for smaller ventures among concerned people working close to home in communities and urban neighborhoods.

Clearly, these new opportunities should not be viewed without caution, not by educators nor by employers nor by any other concerned party. Questions of appropriate responsibility, authority, equity and proper influence have yet to be fully explored, though they are widely recognized. But with those issues firmly before us, we together may be able to harness the widespread goodwill, enthusiasm and generosity for lasting improvements in American public education.

Endnotes

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4. "Memorandum from the Director to the Ad Hoc Committee to Study Programs...." (February 24, 1988), Attachment 1; and personal interviews.

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