



# WHAT IS A PARTNER

**THE GOAL OF SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS** is to develop and cultivate lasting relationships between local churches and schools. While churches have been serving schools in a variety of capacities for many years, we hope to raise the bar from “project-based” involvement to partnerships based on a long-term, personal relationship between the church congregation and the administrators, teachers, staff, and parents of their adopted school. There is a vast difference between this approach and a project-based partnership.

## ● IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH JUST DOING PROJECTS?

Most of the existing connections between churches and schools are “project-based,” meaning churches provide funds and volunteers to accomplish various projects at a school. In most cases, these projects are outside the school’s budget or could not be accomplished without the church. Common projects include an annual school clean-up day, providing a crew of laborers for maintenance tasks, donating winter coats for underprivileged students, and raising funds for a cause promoted by the school. Yet, churches participate in these one-time or even annual projects without ever developing a real relationship with school personnel or parents.

## ● PROJECTS ARE GREAT, BUT COULDN'T THERE BE SOMETHING MORE?

We commend all churches serving their schools through projects. However, we believe any church can be more effectively involved by establishing and cultivating a relationship with the school community. Friendships develop through spending time together regularly and keeping the lines of communication open. In the same way, church leaders should invest time and energy into forming relationships with school staff and administrators. We’ve seen the power of these relationship-based partnerships. Instead of a periodic resource, the church becomes part of the fabric of the school community.

## ● HOW DO YOU BUILD THAT TYPE OF PARTNERSHIP?

This kind of relationship doesn’t just happen; it has to be developed. To begin, a pastor or church leader might invite the school’s principal to have coffee or lunch. This might be followed by a meeting between key church leaders and representatives from the school. The church’s involvement in past and present projects will help build trust, but learning about the school’s vital needs straight from the source is crucial. As the church is able to meet some of those needs – and follows through on their commitment to do so – the school community begins to view it as a real partner.

We can’t stress enough the need to “under-promise and over-deliver.” Many schools have been disappointed by the empty promises of churches in the past, often because of a church serving for a short time and then disappearing. Though short-term service is helpful, it can also prove disheartening and detrimental to building a relationship-based partnership. We believe it is better for a church to do less, but do it consistently.





## ● WHAT ARE THE MINIMAL REQUIREMENTS FOR A REAL PARTNERSHIP?

Communication is crucial in any relationship. We suggest a church wishing to develop a relationship-based partnership maintain at least a minimal level of contact (at least every other month) with the school administrators and staff. Stop by the school office to say hello, and ask if there is anything the church can do to help. If you ask that question consistently, the school will begin to think of the church as a resource when a need arises. As the relationship grows, communication should become even more frequent. This could be a mixture of phone calls, personal visits, and interacting with school personnel while serving or during school functions.

Another essential element is an attitude of service without a hidden agenda. Churches are in the business of providing spiritual direction to the larger community, and should do so freely on their property. However, we ask that when a church serves on school property they maintain the separation of church and state. Individuals and families served by the church may very well seek out spiritual direction from church members, but this should be done off-site at the church building or a neutral location. The school's staff should feel confident that those serving from the church are not crossing that line.

## ● WHAT IF WE CAN'T DO IT ALL?

While communication and serving without an agenda are requisites for any true partnership between a church and a school, there are various levels of time and involvement that can actually define such partnerships. Based on available resources, the number of volunteers, needs at the school, and the church's commitment level, these partnerships can take on many forms. We have established a list of criteria to help a church determine their own interest and commitment level:

- Frequency of involvement
- Number of volunteers involved
- Total number of volunteer hours annually
- Relational significance
- Financial commitment

## ● WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE?

In the end, the success of a partnership between a church and a school is based on the establishment of a mutually beneficial relationship. The school benefits as the church addresses its needs. The church benefits as its congregation gets out of the church building, serves the school in a meaningful way, and builds a bridge to families in the community that are not currently attending church. Trust is built over time, allowing these connections to grow. This, in essence, is the meaning of the word "community."