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ABSTRACT

This paper, which provides a summary of an exploratory conference on school-business partnerships, relies heavily on a background paper for the conference disseminated as Occasional Paper #1. The current status of school-business partnerships is divided into the major categories of adopt-a-school programs, school improvement and support initiatives, job initiatives for disadvantaged youth, and advocacy for public education. Short descriptions and one example is given for each category. Conclusions from an analysis of 9 programs involving school-business partnerships are also provided. Among these conclusions are: that in several instances partnerships have been a catalyst for renewed interest in education and public support for at-risk youth; that partnerships provide youth with direct evidence of the link between education and making a living; and that despite benefits to individual students and entire schools, there are clear limits to what local partnerships can do. Participant views of what to do next include the observations that: limited partnerships "do good" locally but do not tackle larger problems; partnerships can evolve into significant efforts: staying power is important; and business leadership must seek substantive change in education within the present governance structure. Initial next steps are then outlined as suggested by conference participants. Information on the Institute for Educational Leadership is appended. (RR)

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**GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS:
NEXT STEPS IN
SCHOOL BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS
Occasional Paper #2**

A Report on an Exploratory Conference, February 24, 1988

**The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.
Edna McConnell Clark Foundation
May 1988**

PREFACE

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) with the support of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation has been exploring the evolving relationship between the public schools and the business community. IEL has been particularly interested in examining the extent of business involvement with and commitment to resolving the complex issues pertaining to educational reform.

As we pursue these important issues, we would like to share our information with interested parties from the worlds of business, education, and government.

The enclosed Occasional Paper #2, Getting Down to Business: Next Steps in Business Partnerships, is a summary of an exploratory conference which IEL and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation held on February 24, 1988. This paper prepared by education writer, Anne Lewis, represents the second of a series of Occasional Papers on Business-Education Relationships which IEL will disseminate periodically. It relies heavily on a background paper which IEL Senior Program Associate, Martin Blank, prepared for the February conference. The paper, Next Steps in the Relationship Between Business and Public Schools, was disseminated as Occasional Paper #1 in this series. We would welcome your reactions.

William S. Woodside
Former Chairman and
Chief Executive Officer
Primerica Corporation
Chairman, IEL Board of Directors

Michael D. Usdan
President
The Institute for Educational
Leadership

July, 1988

**Getting Down to Business:
Next Steps in School-Business Partnerships**

Very fundamental, sometimes radical, changes are occurring throughout American society, driven primarily by demographic and global challenges to our economy.

Our business leadership is at the center of this vortex. And, as the greatest consumers of the outcomes of American education, business has an enormous stake in ensuring that schools change, too.

This is a pattern of renewal and partnership repeated frequently in this century. Whether the challenge was to educate immigrants, adjust to the Industrial Revolution, or spur technological development to answer the Sputnik competition, business and schools have worked together for common aims.

We are at one of those turning points again. A rapidly changing, high-technology economy requires all future workers, at whatever level, not only to be better prepared in basic subjects but also to be able to use their knowledge in creative, collaborative ways. This demand for much better educated young people comes at a time when the total number of youth is decreasing, but the number of poor and minority students, those hardest to educate, is increasing.

Since the beginning of this decade, business leadership has been searching for ways to renew education and its partnership with schools, particularly in urban areas. These efforts go beyond specific projects with individual schools or districts. In several states corporate leaders initiated and/or supported statewide school reforms. Further, business leaders have participated in writing almost every major education reform report of the past five years.

The education reform movement is at a crucial juncture, with politicians and other policymakers evaluating their efforts. The goals seem to be moving from reform within the present framework to restructuring, from traditional mandates to innovative policymaking.

It also is time to take stock of business involvement in the schools and look ahead. The business community is examining its participation in school change and beginning to ask: Is such involvement sufficient and are there more appropriate ways for business to use its influence?

If the goal is to create better understanding between the business community and the schools, the answer would be "yes" to many of the partnership activities.

If the goal is to improve schooling within its traditional framework, the answer might be "sometimes."

If the goal is to significantly transform the education of children and young people, the answer at this time would have to be "no."

These answers raise crucial further questions--what should be the role of business in changing education? Is that role commonly held across all sectors of the business community? What should be the next steps?

Some recent research provides insights about the effects of current school-business partnerships. In addition, a forum of corporate leaders, brought together by the Institute for Educational Leadership with the support of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, assessed the experience of business leadership with education reform, especially programs targeted to disadvantaged youth. Those attending this mid-winter 1988 meeting also proposed some next steps.

They agreed that business interests need to "get serious" about improving education, going beyond what one commentator has called "fuzzy altruism." And they emphasized that future involvement should be "strategic," focusing on selected policies and practices that truly change the education system rather than further support the status quo.

Getting serious and strategic. How did business leadership reach this conclusion?

The Current Status of School/Business Partnerships

Four major categories cover almost all of current school/business partnership arrangements:

- * Adopt-a-school programs. Probably the most common form of business involvement in education, adopt-a-school programs exist in almost every city. Through these partnerships, business people offer a wide variety of help to an individual school which their company has "adopted." Partnership activities include tutoring, speakers' bureaus, mentoring, teacher training, field trips, donation of employee time to school activities and a variety of other supportive activities. Typically, the specific activities emerge from joint planning between the school and the company.

At least once a week, students from Manhattan's Norman Thomas High School leave their normal school routine behind to become "shadows" at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company office. For two hours or more they work alongside their mentor at the company, who could be anyone from a clerk typist to a vice president. They learn both what skills are required for different jobs and what attitudes are needed to be successful in the workplace. This project at the corporate headquarters for one group of students is repeated at many company offices throughout the country. Also, Metropolitan Life conveys its interest in helping students and teachers through several national and regional projects. The corporation sponsors well-respected surveys of teacher concerns. It also provides scholarships and supports regional efforts to improve teacher education.

- * School improvement and support initiatives. There are a number of individual ways businesses help schools that do not depend on adopting a school. These include equipment contributions; scholarships; summer training programs for education personnel; teacher recognition programs; supplements for college tuition; management training programs; legal, financial or tax assistance; public relations consultation; and other activities which creative school and business people agree to implement.

Many teachers in Bedford County, Tenn., no longer have to run the laundromat or mini-golf program in the summer in order to make ends meet. Through the Service Plus program, instituted by the American Can Company Foundation

(now Primamerica), they are helping their community and helping themselves grow professionally. Service Plus places teachers in community agencies; in the first three years of the program (1984-87), teachers worked in 60 placements at human services, parks and recreation, juvenile services and employment services agencies, as well as on the staffs of public officeholders. Primerica funded the program because of its desire to improve education in a primarily rural, isolated area where teachers had few opportunities to spend their summers in employment consistent with their interests and training. The foundation contribution averaged about \$42,000 a year in the first three years of the program. Once known for its walking horses and girls' basketball team, Bedford County now has a model program of targeted business investment in the schools. The mayor of the county seat, Shelbyville, says he now "brags about" the schools to prospective industries.

* Job initiatives for disadvantaged youth. Operating primarily in metropolitan areas, these programs are student-focused but usually occur away from school. The program strategies include vocational training/work experience, remediation and basic skills, and the development of work skills. However, the selection criteria for the programs often tend to exclude the most at-risk students. The programs often are managed by intermediary organizations, such as Private Industry Councils or specially created local alliances.

The Boston Compact is the most well-publicized school-business partnership of this decade. Launched in 1982, it links the city's business community, unions, universities, city government and schools. The schools pledge better prepared graduates, with specific goals on improving the attendance rate, reducing dropouts and preparing students better in basic skills. The other sectors promise priority hiring or further educational opportunities. Growing out of smaller-scale school-to-work transition programs, the Compact evolved into an unprecedented level of business involvement. Three years after it began, the Compact placed 600 graduating seniors in permanent jobs with Compact members. In several schools which used resources provided by the Compact to evaluate their programs, significant improvements took place. The staff engaged in long-range planning, tying their objectives to those of the Compact. As a result, academic performance improved, and the schools received local and state commendations. The National Alliance of Business is supporting the replication of similar Compacts in seven additional cities.

* Advocacy for public education. Business leaders, to a limited extent, have become advocates at local and state levels for various school reforms, such as extending

the school year, improving math and science programs, and toughening teacher tests and student standards. In a few instances, business leaders also have advocated for greater public investment in the public schools, such as the California Business Roundtable's support of state education reform legislation. Nationally, business advocacy was forceful and articulate in two reports of the Committee for Economic Development (CED) "Investing In Our Children" and "Children in Need." These reports urge the business community to play a stronger role at all levels of education governance to change the education system, especially to meet the needs of disadvantaged children.

Public education in Minnesota has been dramatically redesigned, offering for the first time in the country a statewide plan of educational choice for parents and students. The radical idea would not have succeeded without the strong support of the Minnesota Business Partnership. Accustomed to a tradition of supporting unified efforts for social and economic progress, the Partnership in 1983 sponsored an outside study of public schools, which included the proposal for a choice plan. Passed by the legislature in spring 1988, to be phased in over two years beginning in 1989, the plan allows parents to select the school of their choice anywhere in the state, provided the selection does not violate desegregation rules and the receiving school has room. Despite controversy over the study's recommendations, the business leadership was committed to supporting them and lobbied for the legislation.

What Have We Learned?

Except for positive anecdotal evidence about local and state efforts, reliable data on the effects of school/business partnerships are limited.

However, some research on the stepped-up interest of business in school change is emerging. The most recent, conducted by Public/Private Ventures, discovered that many of the school/business partnerships formed in the early 1980s and targeted at helping at-risk youth no longer exist (five or more years later). This study also analyzed the characteristics of nine programs that have persisted and reflect substantive involvement (the programs are more than two years old, affect more than 50 students and significantly involve business). The analysis concluded that:

- In several instances, the partnerships have been the catalyst for renewed interest in education and public support for at-risk youth.

- The partnerships (especially those that offer mentoring, internships or part-time employment) provide youth with direct evidence of the link between education and making a living.

- The partnerships dispel some "myths" about business involvement in the schools. True, some programs exist mainly for public relations purposes. But quality initiatives, such as those profiled in the study, demonstrate the intensity and wealth of resources which business can bring to partnerships with schools. These collaborations do not narrow the goals of the schools, nor do they intrude on the classroom. Instead, they can strengthen the professional standing of teachers and improve their morale.

- Despite these obvious benefits to individual students and entire schools, there are clear limits to what local partnerships can do. They are not alternatives to education programs; they must build upon pre-existing structures. They can be catalysts for improvements in urban systems, but they alone cannot revitalize schools. Even those that recruit from a disadvantaged school population rarely serve the students most at risk. And businesses will see few immediate benefits from their efforts.

Similar findings are reported in research by Dale Mann of Teachers College/Columbia University. Studying school/business partnerships in 85 school districts Mann found differences between partnerships located in urban areas and those in smaller districts. The latter, dominated by local, small businesses, tend to be more traditional and less interested in basic reform. Mann also found that while manufacturing has maintained a long-standing interest in working with the schools, new service industries are less involved.

"American Business and the Public Schools," a CED publication describing case studies of corporate involvement, views the current efforts as "trendy" but significant.

Business no longer is concerned with narrow vocational skills; rather, it seeks to broaden the skills of high school graduates to aid productivity. While funding from business is limited, it is targeted at important priorities in the schools. And business involvement, says the study, has resulted in increased public funding and important policy changes.

It should be noted, however, that this study looks at involvement by larger corporations. Mann, analyzing local partnership programs, comments that the CED "is not a good sampling of U.S. business."

What Next?

If the concern about restructuring schools--rather than tinkering with them--continues, should business leadership seek more profound changes in education through its partnership activities?

Those attending the IEL/Clark Foundation forum agreed that it should. The business leaders came to the meeting with different levels of experience in school partnerships--as organizers of local programs and alliances, or as funders of pilot programs and research. In some instances, they also were providing personal attention to groups of young people. But their vision was of a much larger role for business in school change.

The forum concluded:

* Generally, the basic interest of business in substantive reform remains "thin." Many activities support the status quo; few address restructuring of schools, especially for the disadvantaged. While limited partnerships may seem to "do good" locally, they do not tackle larger problems of inadequate preparation of students throughout the education system.

A commentary written earlier by one of the forum participants, Theodore Kolderie of the University of Minnesota, reflects the forum's viewpoint. In the Harvard Business Review, he said:

Very little of the present business involvement in public education...can be called either challenging or decisive. Rather, "partnerships" are the order of the day. So the problem gets framed by the people who run the schools. And business gets involved not with the central issues in education but with a classroom here, a school there, a district somewhere else."

- However, business/school partnerships can evolve into significant efforts. They may slip from one form to another, beginning, perhaps, as an adopt-a-school program, changing into a district-wide youth employment plan, and then becoming a general policymaking effort. This was the pattern with the Boston Compact, forum participants pointed out.

- Staying power is important. The longer business stays involved, the more it will understand the nature of school organization and the better it will be able to help implement changes. School officials in urban areas may view business involvement as risky until they are assured of long-term commitments.

The ideal situation is described by the National Alliance of Business:

Often, the more sophisticated partnerships begin quite modestly, and do not aim at more than limited, project-specific activity. Many of them build on a progression of successes, increasing their credibility, investment and trust among the partners. Over time, they broaden their agendas and the numbers of partners involved and take on increasingly difficult problems on many levels at once, becoming multi-dimensional.

- Business leadership must seek substantive change in education within the present governance structure. Some participants at the forum supported a voucher program through which parents could select schools of their choice, but the forum discussions focused primarily on other means for restructuring. These included developing leverage at the state level to improve school programs and organization, broadening interests

beyond at-risk populations to include more challenging education for all students, and supporting the development of leadership for schools.

* "Substantive change" will come about only if the leadership of business and other sectors seek coordinated, comprehensive strategies for helping at-risk children and families. The focus must go beyond the school building.

This approach is recommended strongly by CED. In "Children In Need," it says:

We believe that reform strategies for the educationally disadvantaged that focus on the school system alone will continue to fail these "children in need." We have learned from experience that effective strategies reaching beyond the traditional boundaries of schooling and providing early and sustained intervention in the lives of disadvantaged children can break this vicious cycle of disaffection and despair.

Although restructuring of schools means different things to different researchers, policymakers or practitioners, it appears to contain three elements which could benefit from business experience and leadership.

The first is a redesigning of local schools to provide more autonomy to the school staff and parents. Various networks sponsored by unions, researchers and others, as well as individual school district projects, are testing this idea. Business leadership, with its experience in collaborative management, could help these efforts by supporting training of personnel, providing technical assistance or giving recognition to such restructuring projects.

The second area is that of teaching. In order to create genuine professionalism, business leadership could seek competitive pay for teachers through the state legislature; higher accreditation standards, as through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards now underway; more creative, challenging teacher preparation; and incentives for teachers to make a commitment to educating disadvantaged students (concomitant with an increase in minority teachers). Special investments by business, for example,

could support scholarships and fellowships for minority teacher candidates, or those committed to teaching disadvantaged students.

The third element of restructuring ripe for business involvement is that of accountability. Going beyond the current emphasis on minimum standards, it could extend to the measurement of results based on clearly established goals, to greater professional control, and to more individual school autonomy through changes in local governance structures. Its focus could be school success with the disadvantaged.

These suggested paths of activity focus business on specific goals--getting serious about strategic changes. They are tough issues, not without controversy, and they would require staying power.

In addition to supporting efforts at restructuring, another specific strategy which business leadership could adopt would be to support comprehensive initiatives to help the disadvantaged within a community. These could range from prenatal health care, to day care and preschool education, to dropout prevention and provision of transitional job training opportunities.

The forum participants discussed initial next steps:

- Helping all levels of business leadership to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of public education;
- Seeking change that acknowledges the realistic social/economic situation of young people today and provides multiple opportunities for success rather than a "one best system" which often fails to meet individual needs;
- Encouraging more discussion and broader involvement of the business community in serious, strategic, and sustained partnerships with the schools in order to achieve restructuring;
- Forming a cadre of business leaders committed to restructuring of the public schools which would provide a continuing focal point for business initiatives in reform

and bring business, education, and political leaders together to examine restructuring issues. This group should represent only top business leadership; adopt specific strategies; create or connect to broader collaborations seeking to help children and youth; and set a specified time period to achieve its goals.

This review, and the forum discussions, pose questions to be answered if business/school partnerships are to go beyond "fuzzy altruism" and lead to schools and citizens ready for the 21st century.

- * How can business-school partnerships set the stage for solving difficult issues of education policy, such as basic restructuring?
- * Is there a consensus within the business community on the need for such involvement? Or, on the need for restructuring of education? Does there need to be a consensus? Do the views of small business and corporate leadership differ?
- * Can the experience of instituting major structural changes within businesses in the 1980s be helpful to the education community? How and how much?
- * How can involvement of the business community with structural changes in education be sustained? What can school leadership do to foster sustained involvement?
- * How would the business community develop specific strategies for changing schools?
- * The educationally disadvantaged will require a substantial investment of public resources. Is the business community prepared to support such an investment, both in terms of taxes and of possible controversial stances?
- * How can the business community best use its leverage, e.g., out front in leadership or behind the scenes through other groups/interests?

No matter what focus or strategy is adopted, or what questions are chosen to be answered first, business leaders need to become advocates for change in the schools. More than any other sector, business is aware of the consequences of not acting. The advocacy might be for needed public investment in education. It might be to develop coalitions seeking change and support. It might put its influence behind local and state restructuring initiatives.

There are many partnership possibilities. But there isn't much time to get down to business about using such partnerships to fundamentally improve education for all children and youth.

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ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) has programs in more than 40 states and is unique among the organizations that are working for better schools. It is a Washington-based nonprofit organization dedicated to collaborative problem-solving strategies for education. IEL works at the national, state, and local levels to bring together resources and people from all sectors of society in a new coalition in support of essential change in schools. IEL works to develop the ideas, leadership, resources, and programs that will enable American education to meet today's challenges, and tomorrow's as well. IEL has four primary components that are the driving forces behind its work. These components are as follows.

1. **Coalition Building: Strengthening Business Involvement in Education** -- The strength and vitality of business can be traced directly to the quality of the education America's young people--and business's next generation of workers--receive in our schools. IEL forms the crucial link between the schools and the business community to establish dialogue that creates an understanding of the common interests of business and the schools. From its position as a knowledgeable but uniquely independent participant in school reform, IEL brings business and education together to strengthen both.
2. **Emerging Trends/Policy Issues: Demographic Policy Center** -- America's demographic changes are in evidence everywhere from maternity wards to advertising campaigns, but nowhere are the challenges of these changes more real or pressing than in America's schools. IEL's Demographic Policy Center, headed by nationally prominent demographic analyst Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, is working to generate greater awareness of the forces reshaping our society and to provide services that will make business and political as well as education leaders more responsive to changing needs.
3. **Leadership Development: A Motivator for Informed and Pace-Setting Leadership** -- IEL sponsors a variety of programs that serve to develop and promote leadership. IEL's Education Policy Fellowship Program gives mid-career professionals the opportunity to explore policy issues and to understand better how policy is influenced. In collaboration with the Education Commission of the States, IEL sponsors the State Education Policy Seminars Program which provides for the exchange of ideas and perspectives among key state-level political and educational policymakers. Through a variety of leadership development services to public school systems, IEL has a learning laboratory to work with school-based staff. IEL and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, jointly sponsor the National LEADership Network and work in collaboration with the 51 LEAD centers across the U.S.--with principals, with superintendents, and with other school leaders--to promote leadership in schools.
4. **Governance** -- IEL's governance work focuses on all levels of education policy and management, with the emphasis on performance and action to help local education leaders sort out appropriate roles, responsibilities, and trade-offs. Currently, IEL is working through its School Board Effectiveness Program to develop leadership capabilities and is examining various aspects of local school boards to enhance their effectiveness as governing bodies. IEL's Teacher Working Conditions Project seeks to understand and address the work place conditions and issues which promote or impede teacher effectiveness in urban school systems. This project is part of the overall national effort to professionalize teaching and to gain greater commitment to excellence in learning.

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