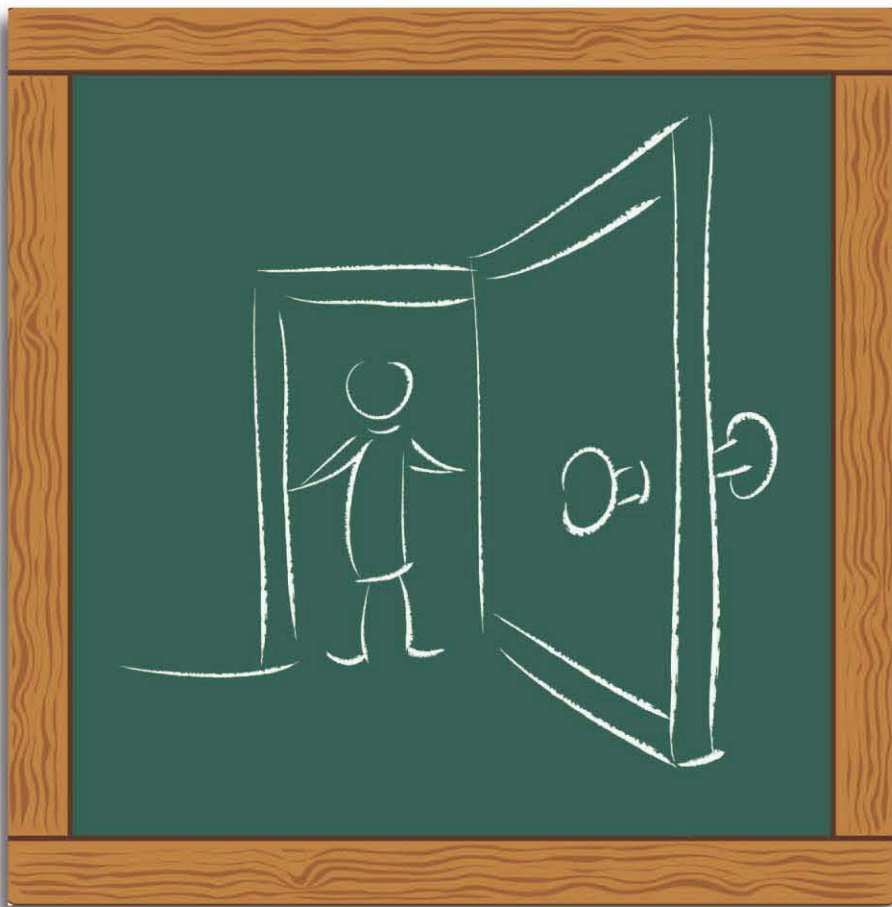


Finding Funding: Community Partnerships and Public Education

The Southington School District's efforts to reach out to the community resulted in a variety of new partnerships and revenue streams.

By Sherri-Lin P. DiNello, CPA



“Of course, I have money in the budget for that. How much do you need?” That’s probably not the way most school business officials are responding to requests for funding these days. They are more likely to say, “No, maybe next year” or “Sorry, but we just don’t have the money.”

The Southington Board of Education in Connecticut has committed itself to asking school administrators to look for funding alternatives so the board doesn’t have to continuously say no.

The Southington School District serves 6,900 students with an operating budget of \$79.5 million, but that amount simply doesn’t fund all its

needs. The district made it a priority to reach out into the community to build partnerships. We are fortunate that the Southington community enthusiastically stepped up to the challenge; the result has been a variety of partnerships and revenue streams that bring additional funds into our classrooms. Our community exemplifies the expression, “It takes a village to raise a child.”

New Funding, New Programs

The newly established partnerships and additional revenues developed in several ways. The first was the establishment of the Southington Education Foundation. Education foundations are certainly not a new concept; however, this foundation was unique with regard to the speed with which it moved from idea to action. One year from the day of the first organizational meeting, the Southington Education Foundation was providing grants to our teachers to fund classroom innovation. In year two, at the Southington Education Foundation annual gala event, the foundation announced its long-term plan to fund an outdoor science center in the amount of \$600,000.

Breakfast in our elementary schools was the next program funded by new community partnerships. District personnel met with individuals from several local nonprofit agencies to share with them the con-



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GETTING APPROVAL TO ATTEND THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL MEETING

Build Your Case

Peer-to-peer networking opportunities, inspiring keynote speakers, and enlightening skill-building workshops—bring the benefits back to your school by building your case to attend the 2011 AM&E.

Follow these four steps:

1. Write down 5 strategies or issues being addressed in your district right now.

2. Think about how you personally contribute to these strategies and make a list of these personal contributions.

3. Look at ASBO's Annual Meeting Website (www.asbointl.org/AnnualMeeting) for a list of topics that will be available at the AM&E. Mark the topics that relate to your list of personal contributions to the district's strategies. Also make a note of speakers or other people at the conference you would like to meet.

4. Write a short business case detailing how attending these sessions and meeting these people will help you contribute to your organization's strategy to address critical issues.

REGISTRATION OPENS MAY 2, 2011.

Register before July 29, 2011 to take advantage of discounted pricing.

Part of your case might read:

Our district is highly focused on healthy indoor environment initiatives and I am responsible for finding cost-effective ways to assure that the classroom environment is conducive to teaching and learning. At the conference, there is a workshop called Environmental Health Management for Students and Schools that addresses these factors. I would like to attend this session and meet privately with the expert presenters in order to get specific ideas about actions we should be taking in our district.

The future of education funding is in flux, and to gain insight on upcoming trends, I would like to attend ASBO's EDUNOMICS session, which will present U.S. economic data and an expert panel of business officials discussing the education trends in different regions and actions districts must take to succeed in the changing economic and political environment.

Another critical issue in our district is budget shortfalls from all sources. Several sessions at the AM&E, including Cost Containment and Cost Cutting Strategies in Troubled Times, will give me new ideas for creating better efficiencies and budgeting for the short-term future.

See the full business case letter online at www.asbointl.org/AnnualMeeting

Meeting Follow Up

Emphasize the value of your attendance. Immediately after the conference (perhaps on the airplane ride home), write a concise summary (one to two pages) of what you've learned, who you met at the conference, and how you will use the information you received and contacts you made to improve your school district. Submit the summary to individuals who sponsored your attendance, thanking them for the opportunity. Share what you learned with your team through your notes and the recorded sessions on the Live Learning Center. Keep up with contacts after the meeting with the AM&E ConnectEd group at www.asbointl.org/ConnectEd

If you'd like help with your meeting preparation, contact us at asboreq@asbointl.org

See you in Seattle!

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MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR *Experience.*

In a world that is increasingly "virtual," sometimes there is just **no substitute for face-to-face** conversation and engagement. That's what the AM&E 2011 experience is all about and why we hope you'll plan to come early and stay late for optional AM&E opportunities.

The networking starts on Friday, September 16 with pre-conference workshops and continues through Monday, September 19 with post-conference workshops and activities.

Here's a preview of what to expect:

- Earn additional **credit hours** and training on selected topics available in pre- and post-conference workshops.
- Experience the sights, sounds, and smells of Seattle with your colleagues on a post-conference **sightseeing tour**.
- Demonstrate your commitment to social responsibility and give back to the Seattle community by attending the post-conference **Positive Impact Program**.

Watch your email inbox for more details or visit www.asbointl.org/AnnualMeeting



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Strategic Partners



cern that, although our district has a relatively small free and reduced-price lunch population (6%), children were coming to school hungry. These agencies contributed funds to establish a pilot breakfast program at our three Title I schools during the second half of the 2009–2010 school year. Then, one agency stepped up to provide funds to roll out the program in all eight elementary schools this school year.

This foundation was unique with regard to the speed with which it moved from idea to action.

We offer the program as a “grab-n-go” at most schools; consequently, students don’t need early transportation and can pick up their breakfast on the way into the building and then proceed to their classrooms. In the school with the most students who receive free and reduced-price meals, our local school bus company offered to provide an additional run to one neighborhood to pick up students earlier than usual. These students could arrive early to eat breakfast and receive homework assistance before school.

High school students played the largest role in our third alternate funding stream. The Southington Board of Education changed its advertising policy to allow the display of banners on the high school athletic fields. This change opened the door for students to formulate a plan to sell advertising space to local businesses.

We worked with our business teachers and their accounting and marketing students to develop a business model called “Knightvertising” (the Blue Knight is the Southington High School mascot). The students formulated a variety of ways to market the space to businesses and set up the necessary spreadsheets to account for the income and expenses associated with the sales.

In the first year, the students raised more than \$13,000 for the student activity account. Student organizations and athletic teams now have an opportunity each year to apply for minigrants to help fund their programs or new initiatives. In addition to funding, this project provides unique hands-on business experience for students in the areas of public speaking, marketing, and accounting.

Tackling Technology

The district received the most outside funding from three separate cash donations to promote technology use in our schools.

Our administrative team works hard alongside the board of education to ensure that all our students have similar learning experiences and that there is equity among schools. Achieving this objective was becoming increasingly difficult because, through building renovations and new construction, some schools had state-of-

the-art technology while others had minimal technology in their classrooms. We were not afraid to discuss this issue publicly and share our concerns during board of education meetings or in smaller meetings with parents.

A member of the board of trustees of a nonprofit foundation that planned to liquidate all its assets contacted the district, offering to contribute money toward district technology purchases. We gladly gave the trustees a tour of one of our recently renovated elementary schools so they could observe the students and teachers using interactive whiteboards, projectors, and document cameras. After the visit, the trustees said they wanted to donate funds so that all our fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms had the same modern technology.

Asking for Support

As school business officials continue to stretch their budget dollars and figure out how to balance their budget without American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds, we will all have to look at alternative funding streams. These examples are just the beginning of community involvement in education for our district.

We were not afraid to discuss this issue publicly and share our concerns

If you are looking to establish partnerships with businesses and nonprofit groups within your district, consider these three important yet basic steps:

1. Openly communicate the positives and negatives about your district so people will know your strengths and weaknesses.
2. Open your school buildings and invite the community to visit. Let people see firsthand the programs you want to showcase and the areas that have needs.
3. Ask for the necessary support. If you don’t take the time to invite community members, businesses, and nonprofit agencies to a meeting, or into your schools, you will never know if they would like the opportunity to partner with your district.

We are proud of the partnerships we have developed, and our students are clearly the beneficiaries of these efforts. In two years, our partnerships generated more than \$400,000 for our students. Our residents can stand tall knowing that in addition to their tax dollars’ supporting public education, members of our community are willing to contribute in a variety of ways to increase the opportunities for our children. Remember, it really does take a village.

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