

The Value and Power of Business/School Partnerships

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the value and power of Business/School Partnerships. In 1991, as the newly appointed Principal of Eastern Technical High School in Baltimore, I was challenged with empowering a school and community to revitalize and reinvent itself. At that time, Eastern Tech was rated unsatisfactory in many areas of the Maryland State Department of Education's School Report Card.

I felt that the first step in building a high performance high school should be an agreement by all constituent groups on a shared vision or mission. During my early focus sessions, the business community members were the primary catalysts in getting the constituencies to address the purpose of high school and the preparation of students for the complex, changing workforce needs of the 21st Century. Enriched by the human resources and financial contributions of the business community and propelled by the hard work of students, parents, and staff, Eastern Tech was named a Maryland Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 1997 and a United States Department of Education New American High School in 1999.

Serving as a national demonstration site for systemic school reform, Eastern Tech has hosted visitors from forty-five states and twenty-five countries. Visitors come to the school to observe outstanding instruction and a school community, which welcomes and embraces the positive influences of businesses and corporations. As a result of business partnerships, the school has a Lockheed Martin Applied Physics Lab, a Verizon Distance Learning and Telecommunications Showcase, and many curricular and co-curricular

activities sponsored by Mid-Atlantic Coca-Cola, the Baltimore Orioles, Associated Builders and Contractors, Baltimore Gas and Electric, Black and Decker US, Inc., Comcast Cable Communications, GE, Middle River Aircraft Systems, the Engineering Society of Baltimore, and over one hundred other business partners.

For a moment, I would like to focus on one type of business partnership that seems to garner more scrutiny than others, the sale of foods and beverages at school. In 2001, Maryland Senate Bill 453 was filed to ban any commercial logos and vending machines in the schools. The bill was called the “Captive Audience/Stop Commercialism in Schools Act.” Parents, students, and educators from across the state shared their personal stories of the positive value of business partnerships and Senate Bill 453 was defeated. Maryland law already requires that vending machines do not compete with the school lunch program. Also, machines can be operational only at the end of the last lunch period.

In my experience, the best way to foster partnerships is for the local community to make the final decisions about vending machines in their schools. That allows the local school community to make the decision about what kind of products – water, teas, juices, sports drinks, diet and regular sodas – should be offered for sale. Most importantly, the local community makes the decision about which educational activities benefit from the revenues.

At Eastern Tech, we average about \$30,000 in revenue from our partnership with Mid-Atlantic Coke. The revenue has helped support drama productions and a wide variety of interscholastic sports. It has been used to purchase computers, train faculty and staff and to pay activity fees for economically disadvantaged students.

Parental involvement and beverage choice are essential for successfully managing these powerful business/school partnerships. Educators are under tremendous pressure to improve the quality of education at the very time when financial resources are diminishing. To meet the needs of our students, we have to find ways to work with and involve businesses and corporations. Soft drink partnerships are one of the most successful models, if managed appropriately.

The partnership key is establishing an ongoing, collaborative relationship among the parents of the students, the school administration, and the business community. It is important to establish a culture of partnerships in which the school and business communities work together to best serve the needs of students. Such partnerships are social and economic structures, which empower school communities and enhance student achievement, the school environment, and pride in the public schools. This is the value and power of Business/School Partnerships.

Robert J. Kemmery, Jr.
Executive Director – Student Support Services
Baltimore County Public Schools
6901 Charles Street
Towson, MD 21204
Phone: 410-887-4360
Fax: 410-494-4317
Email: rkemmery@bcps.org