

A Systematic Approach to Developing Comprehensive School Partnerships: Enhancing Learning Environments and Improving Student Performance

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Schools

Richmond, Virginia

- Population: @197,000
- Student composition:
 - African-American: 88%
 - Caucasian: 7%
 - Latino: 3%
- Students qualifying for free lunch: 69%
- Ranked 5th most dangerous city (FBI)

Superintendent's Initiative for School Excellence

- School-Community partnerships aid in achieving the #1 goal of Richmond Public Schools: **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**
- School-Community partnerships address Benchmark 5.1(Balanced Scorecard) -
“Implement a comprehensive and aligned system of partnering and volunteering leading to a more meaningful involvement in schools resulting in increased student achievement!”

School-Community Partnerships

- “connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses that are forged to promote students’ social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development” (Sanders, 2002, p. 20).

Participants in Supt's Initiative

- Chamber of Commerce
- Richmond School Board
- Richmond City Council
- The Mayor's Office
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Philanthropic Organizations
- Parent and Teacher Organizations

Planning Contract with VCU

- Literature Review on Effective Partnerships
- Survey of Principals on Partnership Activities
- Review of Schools with Mature Partnerships

The Literature Review

■ Benefits to Students

- Higher grade point averages
- Higher scores on standardized tests
- Enrollment in more challenging academic programs
- More classes passed and credits earned
- Better attendance
- Improved behavior at home and school
- Better social skills and adaptation at home

■ Benefits to Businesses

- Attracts more competitive and qualified workforce
- Provides potential employees with knowledge and skills necessary for success in business
- Encourages employees to contribute to community
- Enhances business-community relationships
- Provides better understanding of community needs and values

Standards for School-Community- Business Partnerships

- Strong partners
- Shared vision
- Focus on student learning
- Involving families
- Involving teachers
- Administrative support
- Reciprocal service
- Structures, resources and roles

Survey Findings

- 31 responses
- Most frequent themes
 - Need for designated human resources (5 responses)
 - Worthwhile partnerships require significant investments of time (5 responses)
 - All partners must be committed (4 responses)
 - Ongoing communication is essential (3 responses)
 - Partnerships require financial resources (3 responses)
 - Training is needed to prepare partners for their work together (1 response)

Survey Responses Indicate

- Partnerships with stated goals are focusing on learning and achievement
- Adult family members of students are not involved in the majority of Richmond Public Schools
- Teacher involvement is limited in approximately 50% of our partnerships
- Human resource allocations are necessary for successful partnerships
- On-going communication between partners is needed for successful partnerships

Did not indicate

recognition that academic achievement, physical health and development, and socio-emotional development are interrelated

Products of Planning Process

- Template/Rubric for Assessing School – Community– Business Partnerships (Based on NCATE Standards for Professional Development Schools)
- Action Plan

Components of Plan

- Needs Assessment
- Website Development/Maintenance
- Staff Development on Partnerships
- Site Coordinators for each School
- Partnership Facilitators
- Central Office for Community Partnerships
- Steering Committee

Partnership Status in RPS – Phase I Needs Assessment Survey

- **41 schools surveyed** (26 elementary, 7 middle, 6 high schools, 2 specialty)
- **336 = Partnerships identified** (24% Business, 23% Faith, 33% Community, 20% Paid)
- **Partnerships included:** mentoring, tutoring, literacy initiatives, lunch buddy, healthcare, social service, arts, classroom/media room aides, after school programs, one-time projects

Source: Virginia Mentoring Partnership

Survey Findings

- **2,119** = Number of volunteers in the schools
- **59,213 hours/year** = Number of total volunteers and paid professional hours
- **39,877 hours/year** = Total volunteer hours which equates to \$719,381.08 (based on \$18.04 national rate)
- **21,851** = number of students affected by partnership services

Survey Findings

Total volunteer time spent in hrs = 39,877/yr

- \$699,841 (National average value of volunteer hour=\$17.55)

Total Paid professional time spent in hrs = 19,336/yr

- \$TBD by RPS

Combined volunteer and paid hours = 59,213/yr

- Most at any one school 12,100
- Fewest at any one school 55
- Financial Contribution – in-kind to \$1000's

Phase II – Survey on Partnership Coordination Position

- Who is responsible for organizing and coordinating partnership activities
- Time spent by primary person on partnership activities
- Time spent by other personnel
- Level of organization (based on NCATE characteristics of effective partnerships)

New RPS Office of School-Community Partnerships

- Created in May 2006 and staffed in August 2006
- Goals to assist schools with refining their partnership teams
- Building new partnerships
- Training staff and volunteers with the support of the Virginia Mentoring Partnership
- Collaborating between schools on best practices
- Data Collection and management
- Policies and procedures
- Public relations and communications
- Group events and celebrations

Effective Partnerships Require:

- Mutual Commitments - RECIPROCAL
- Represents interests of all -INCLUSIVE
- Involvement is embedded in all aspects - ONGOING
- Whole system has stakes and roles - SYSTEMIC
- Focus is on critical issues - SUBSTANTIVE
- Strategic, not reactive – PROACTIVE

Source: Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Developing a Partnership Base

- Develop a plan
 - Make it comprehensive
 - Make it a win-win
- Recruit your head cheerleader
 - This person needs to be a community leader
 - Let them lead the charge
- Be careful what you ask for
 - They may be high maintenance but well worth the price

Community Partners Perspective

- Need to feel welcome and respected
- For some, childhood experience with schools not positive
- Important to have congruence on definition of engagement

School-Business Partnerships: An Academic Perspective

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Keeping Current in My Field



- Reading professional journals connects academics to current research in their fields
- Engagement in the field keeps academics current on the real issues

Lessons from the Field

- Teachers don't change their habits easily
- Trust has to be established before innovations can occur
- Building trust takes time!



Teacher Education and School-Business Partnerships

- If school-business partnerships are to be successful, teachers must be active and assertive
- Training pre-service teachers for their roles in school-business partnerships is more efficient than re-training them later



Research

- Research is a professional responsibility for most academics
- As a relatively new idea, school-business partnerships offer many avenues for empirical research



Community Volunteer Partners Needs

- Support and commitment from school leadership
- Partnership commitment needs to be communicated to all school staff
- Access to leadership
- Clear lines of communication and designated school point person
- Openness to periodic feedback
- Periodic recognition

Issues to Consider

- School environment is high pressure
- Past partnership efforts that failed may decrease openness to new efforts and building trust will take time

To make partnership effective:

- Create the mindset of building a relationship with the whole school
- Start with an “how can we help you” attitude. Ask “What are your school goals and needs?”

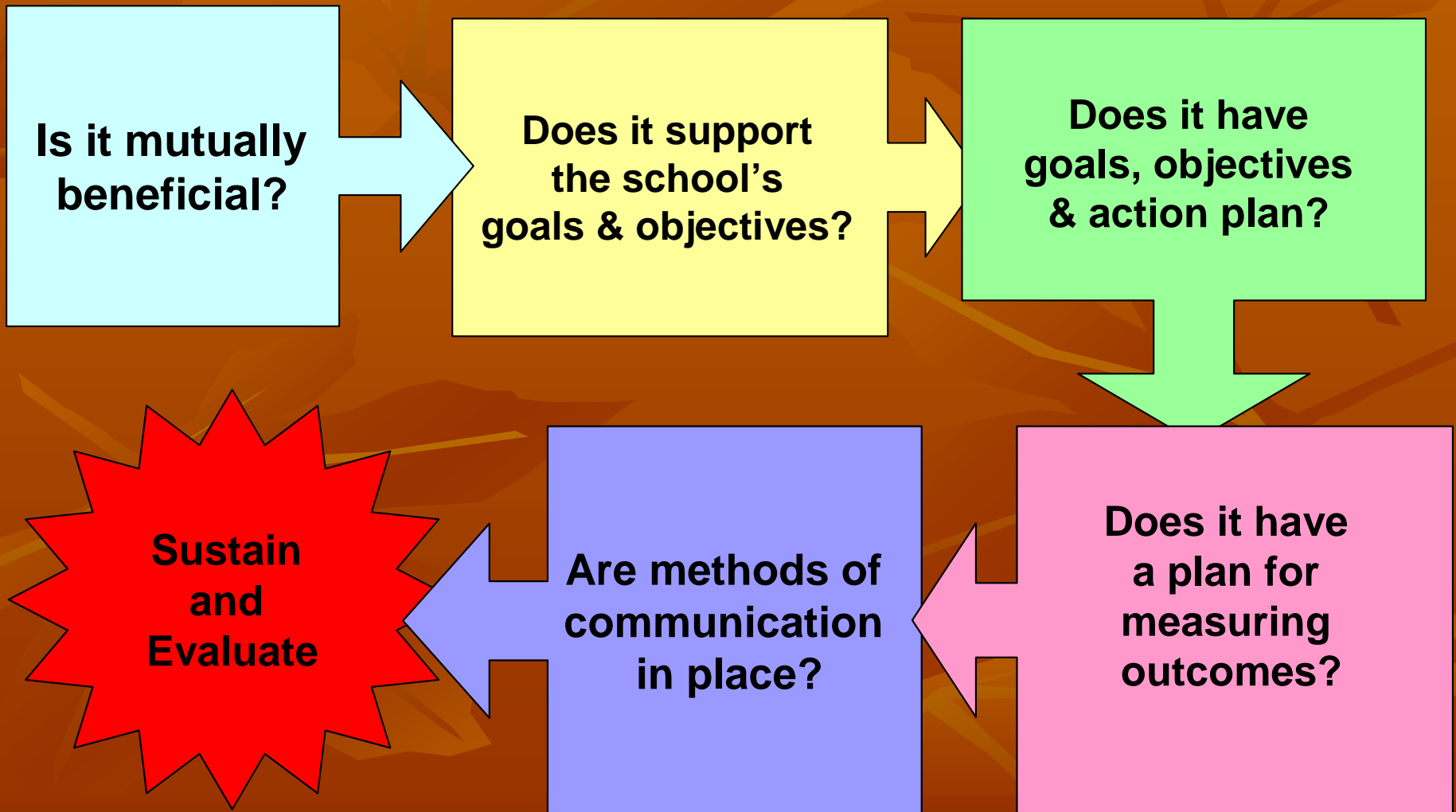
Guidelines & Lessons Learned

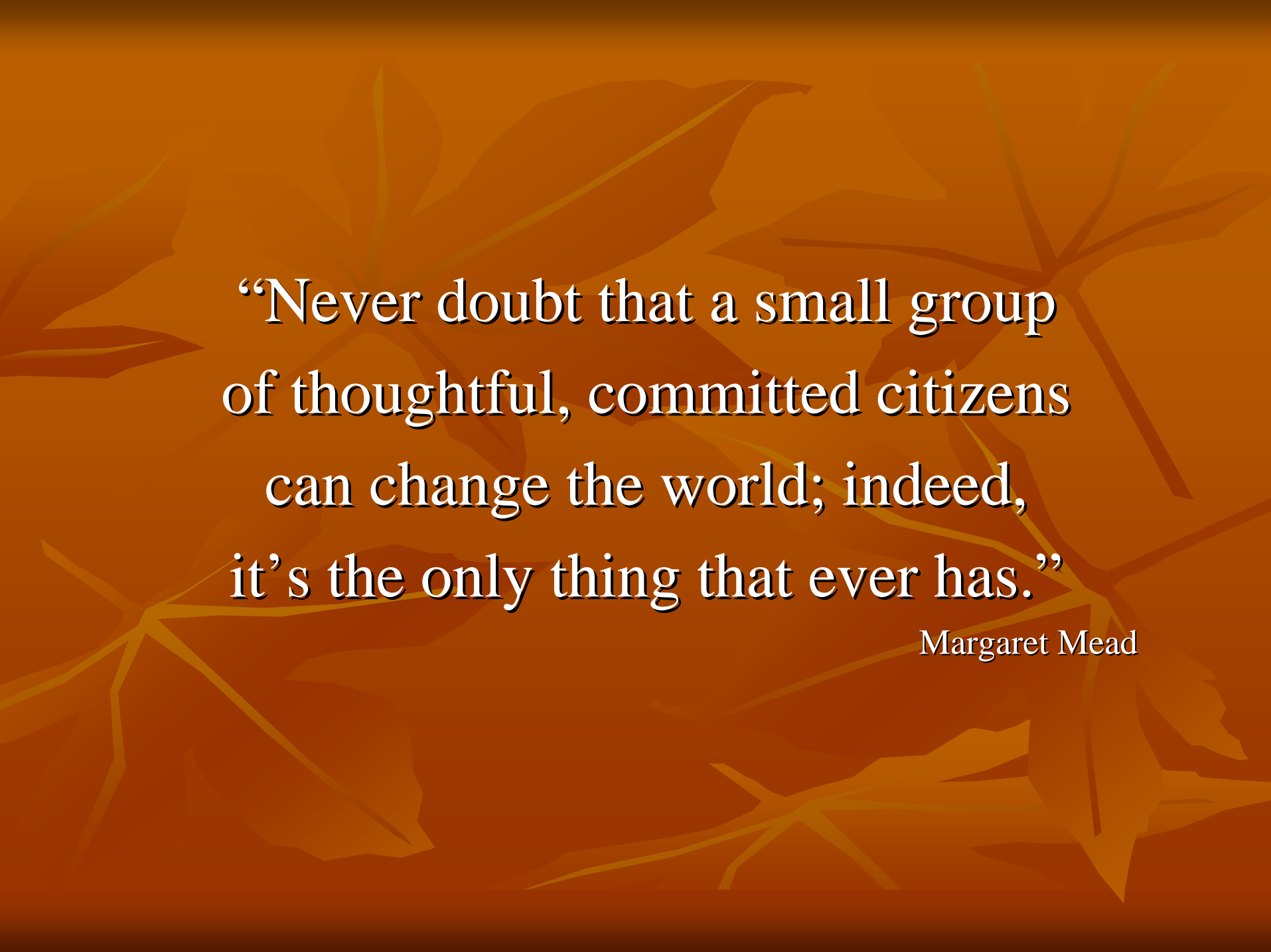
Partnership Activities:

- Must be built on shared values and philosophies
- Should be defined by mutually beneficial goals and objectives
- Should be integrated into the respective cultures
- Driven by clear management process and structure
- Should define specific, measurable outcomes

Source: Council for Corporate and School Partnerships

Strategy for Building a Successful Partnership





“Never doubt that a small group
of thoughtful, committed citizens
can change the world; indeed,
it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Applying Lessons from Partnership Workshop

- 1. Briefly describe a need/challenge in their organization that might benefit from a partnership.
- 2. Describe the type of partnership that might assist you in addressing this need
- 3. Taking your identified partner's perspective, identify 2-3 potential benefits that this partnership might provide for them.
- 4. Based on what you have learned today as well as your existing knowledge list 3-5 issues/factors that will need to be addressed to ensure an effective partnership
- 5. List strategies that might assist you in establishing/strengthening this partnership.
- 6. Discuss your proposal.