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Partners in Education

The Need for Presidential Leadership

School reform today is marked by partnerships among schools, colleges, businesses, government agencies, and communities. Within the university, however, these efforts too often arise through the College of Education alone. The crucial need to develop effective collaborations will be frustrated until the president of the university serves as a leader in educational partnerships.

The author's experiences as dean of the College of Letters and Sciences and leader of the State University of New York Purchase Westchester School Partnership, followed by his current role as president of Roosevelt University in Chicago, have convinced him of the significance of presidential leadership for the success of educational partnerships involving universities.

If we search for an overriding theme that underlies the scattered solutions to school reform, it is the realization that educators alone cannot improve our schools. Politicians and business leaders, professors and school teachers, government and community representatives, school administrators and union leaders have met in educational partnerships that struggle to transcend special interests. The record of the eighties is mixed, and collaborations of schools, colleges, businesses, government agencies, and communities have had varying degrees of success; but the dominant note of the decade is surely one of partnership. We finally have begun to answer Henry Morrison Clinton's criticism, expressed in 1923: "As a people, we do not think in terms of education; we think in terms of schools; we have no educational system; we have an elementary school, a high school, and a college."

Despite the vast number of partnerships that have been forged, they too often arise within the university through the College of Education alone or through the energies of faculty members working individually. Although the rhetoric of higher education now calls increasingly for excellence in teaching and service as the *sine qua non* for tenure, every faculty member knows that publications probably will be the final measure of success; involvement in educational partnerships may be considered a diversion, even a liability, in the quest for professional advancement. Until the president of a university clearly supports his claim that teaching and

service are critical criteria for tenure and promotion, until he proactively serves as a leader in educational partnerships, until he devotes university resources in collaboration with the schools, until he brings his entire institution into a leadership role for the community, the crucial need to develop partnerships will be frustrated and the president will have failed the various constituencies with which he interacts and which look to him for guidance.

A college or university is the ideal constituent to create academic relationships with secondary schools, to sort out educational priorities with corporate classrooms, and to engage citizens in partnership projects that affect their communities. Colleges and universities—unlike high schools, corporations, and community organizations—are structured to develop educational partnerships. They have academic departments and faculty who educate future teachers and who carry on their own research; they house offices of external affairs and development, through which fund raising can occur; and they organize alumni and citizen groups eager to participate in educational partnerships. Colleges now must view the development and administration of educational partnerships as a central aspect of their mission, as an obligation to the society they serve, and as an opportunity to establish an agenda for action that no school system, corporation, community agency, or government can realize alone.

The critical figure in the creation and implementation of an educational partnership must be the president—not a dean or a vice-president or a faculty member pressing for resources, but a president who rolls up his or her sleeves and serves as catalyst as well as collaborator, who makes this activity a high priority for the university.

Two of my own experiences in developing educational partnerships may be informative, for they involve my roles as dean and as president; they span the past eight years, during which partnerships have become popular, and concentrate on my experiences at the College of Purchase/State University of New York and Roosevelt University; and they occur at public and private institutions, at a small suburban college and an urban university.

SUNY Purchase, 1983-1988

One of my personal attractions to SUNY Purchase in 1983 was the promise of the president that a local corporation, American Can (now Primerica), was prepared to support a major collaboration between the College of Letters and Sciences and the schools. This seemed odd at Purchase, for half the college was devoted to conservatory training in the performing arts, there was no professional program in education—indeed there was resistance to anything of the kind—and the College of Letters and Sciences was devoted to a traditional liberal arts education for selective students. Purchase, thirty-five miles north of New York City, seemed the

least likely campus in which an educational partnership might flourish. American Can also was a strange candidate; it was an historically conservative corporation, nestled in Greenwich, Connecticut, a few miles away. But the combination of a forceful chief executive officer (William Woodside) who cared deeply about educational reform, a foundation leader (Peter Goldberg) who had a social agenda, and a college president (Sheldon Grebstein) who supported the partnership financially as well as rhetorically created the context for success. When I came to SUNY Purchase in 1983, I knew that I had the support of the president's authority in addition to my own as dean and could proceed to try to alter the values of the liberal arts faculty—no simple task—by making participation in the educational partnership as important as other kinds of service and research.

The SUNY Purchase Westchester School Partnership was established in 1983 by eleven school districts and the State University of New York at Purchase, with five-year funding of \$300,000 from the American Can Company. As dean of Letters and Sciences and as a neutral college figure among competitive school administrators, I chaired the steering committee of eleven superintendents and four college administrators. Together, we set in motion a wide variety of programs.

- The first was a Math/Science Resource and Computer Training Center, funded by the State Education Department, concentrating on elementary science.
- The second was an extensive program of week-long institutes in chemistry, mathematics, physics, writing, and other disciplines, sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation; within three years, more than five hundred teachers participated in institutes of thirty teachers each, with extensive follow-up sessions throughout the academic year.
- The third was Project WELD (Workshops for Educator Leadership Development), modeled after IBM's Education Executive Program and administered initially by loaned executives who had organized the IBM program; this led to the Center for Leadership Development.
- Other programs included an Institute in Motivation, a Fellowship Program for Guidance Counselors, a Center for Economic Education, a Freshman Great Books course for gifted high school seniors, a program for retired executives, and an extensive project for dropout prevention.

In each case, the program was a local adaptation of a successful national model.

The initial funding from the American Can Company led to four positions from the State University of New York—the first for the executive director and then three additional positions for administrative staff and the director of the Center for Mathematics and Science Education. The support of the State University of New York was crucial, for those positions are worth, with

fringe benefits, more than \$250,000 a year. Most importantly, the SUNY funding institutionalized the partnership. The SUNY Purchase Westchester School Partnership is now a permanent feature of SUNY Purchase and the

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Westchester community. The full-time positions, which created core support for the partnership, led in turn to programmatic support from corporations like IBM (for the science institutes and the leadership program) and General Foods (for the dropout prevention program). After the second year, the school districts (which, by 1988, had grown to thirty-three) contributed dues proportionate to their student population. In addition to the steering committee of superintendents, each program had an advisory committee of faculty, teach-

ers, and parents to make certain that there was grass-roots support. By having the superintendents and their teachers involved in the process, success virtually was guaranteed for each project.

Finally, the important point to make about the SUNY Purchase Westchester School Partnership is that it was a genuine educational collaboration, involving a university and local school districts with the state education department and government agencies, large corporations and local businesses, and community organizations. It became more than a program for accelerated or at-risk students, more than teacher-training institutes, more than an outreach to the community. It became the sum of all these parts. As dean, I had the absolute support of my president and provost and was in a central position to include the partnership as a unit in the liberal arts college, interacting with the traditional disciplines.

Faculty naturally were resistant to the formation of the educational partnership, but once they saw that resources from the state and the private sector were far more available for collaborative activities with the schools than for higher education itself, they became advocates of educational reform. In addition to securing laboratory equipment that came with grant proposals and remained after projects were completed, in addition to extra compensation they earned as consultants to or as leaders of partnership projects, they began to see enrollments increase in their departments. They also came to enjoy participating in the teacher training institutes and collaborating with highly motivated secondary school teachers in their own disciplines.

Roosevelt University, 1988-

When I came to Chicago's Roosevelt University as president in September 1988, I knew that an educational partnership would be a high priority of

my administration. The Chicago public school system, which was an important feeder of students to Roosevelt, was in disarray, and the business community had asserted itself as a leader in persuading state government to support the Chicago schools. The reform movement initiated by Mayor Harold Washington gave power to 595 local school councils, each of which includes six parents, two community leaders, two teachers, and one principal.

Other constituencies had joined business in educational reform: city government, nonprofit educational agencies, foundations, the teachers union, and programs within the colleges and universities. There were inevitable difficulties in implementing reform and more political maneuvering than one would care to imagine—and the record, which would require another essay, is still unclear. But in 1988, everyone agreed that the vitality of the city depended upon the reformation of the public schools, and one of every seven graduates of Roosevelt University was working in those schools. It was clear that in addition to my own belief in the need for educational partnerships, Chicago provided a setting where all that I had learned could be added to the work already accomplished by the College of Education and could truly test the possibilities of presidential influence.

The programs that were launched almost immediately were teacher training institutes in a variety of academic disciplines; a leadership academy for aspiring principals and superintendents; training programs for the members of designated local school councils; enhancement of six-year-old projects in adult, family, and workplace literacy; collaborative work on dropout prevention with the Cities-in-Schools program; and a host of other activities specifically within the field of education.

These were relatively easy to mount, because a first-rate faculty from the College of Education was ready to assert leadership and welcomed presidential support. Faculty from disciplines within the College of Arts and Science began to collaborate, once they realized that an educational partnership was an institutional priority and that participation in it would count toward professional advancement. In address after address at the Faculty Senate and other forums, I underscored my own commitment to educational reform, indicating that the one constituent in Chicago's educational reform movement that was insufficiently involved was higher education; it was at best fragmented, at worst absent. I wanted Roosevelt to be *institutionally* committed to the educational reform movement—to be viewed as a leader of an educational partnership with the schools, business, government, and the community.

I had also come to the conclusion that educational reform, especially in inner-city schools, cannot occur in isolation. Our own partnership is therefore one of five centers in an Institute for Metropolitan Affairs that includes economic and community development, public administration for leaders of

nonprofit organizations, health care, and mass communications. An educational partnership must be integrated with the social and political forces that reach beyond it and in many cases encircle professional educators; for the community leaders who care deeply about education are the same people who guide and control other organizations that have the deepest impact on the educational process. This is true at every economic level in the society, but it is most apparent among what William Julius Wilson has called "the truly disadvantaged."

Throughout the development of our educational partnership, we have worked with leaders of the school system, creating a steering committee of representatives and advisory committees for each of the programs. Al-

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though we have consistently involved school officials in all our plans, we have scrupulously avoided the public school bureaucracy and have organized programs in teacher training, leadership, advanced placement, dropout prevention, literacy, and other projects that are supportive of the system. In this way, the educational partnership supports direct needs and avoids political interests which so often

can impede reform. When an educational partnership secures its funds from foundations, corporations, and federal and state agencies, it has a fiscal independence that can be very powerful; and so long as it is supportive of the school system, so long as it includes leaders of the system in its partnership, it can have considerable impact on the system itself.

Nationally, we already can see the future direction of educational partnerships. That future rests primarily with colleges and universities willing to assert leadership in initiating the partnerships. A program such as the Bay Area Writing Project has moved within the past eighteen years from a local success to replication throughout the states. The National Faculty, the Academic Alliance Movement, and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation Institutes have experienced similar expansion. The National Network for Educational Renewal is now in place and has secured the cooperation of numerous state universities and their local schools. As it becomes more visible in the next few years, it undoubtedly will dramatize the impact that college-school collaborations can have in creating coherence in American education.

Emerging from enlightened self-interest, educational partnerships already have become a necessity in most localities—chosen, not mandated, and offering the powerful promise of reform. Wisely organized, a partnership strengthens each culture it encompasses—college, school, business, community, and government—and creates a new and broader culture of mutual concern for the improvement of learning in America. But unless the

university president becomes a leader in the development of educational partnerships—not only for the institution he guides, but also for all those other educational, community, corporate, and governmental agencies that look to the university itself for leadership—they will lack the coherence essential for success.

After two years as a university president, I know the pressures that can take priority in daily management: enrollments, fund raising, resources, the shared governance of faculty and students and administrators. The list sometimes seems endless. But on that crowded agenda, the educational partnership must find a primary place. The president owes an act of leadership to the colleagues of his or her college or university, to the schools that prepare their students, the businesses that employ them, and the communities in which they live.

Suggested Readings

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