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# School/Business Collaborations with Implications for School Administrators

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Collaboration—the very word connotes mutuality, partnership, reciprocity, a relationship of equals. What ingredients feed a viable school/business collaboration? What has been learned from such collaborations? What issues must be considered for school/business collaborations to remain viable? What are the implications in each of these questions for school administrators? This narrative is a response to these queries, through the case study filter of a statewide program of school/business collaborations in New Jersey.

## MAPS: A Case Study

MAPS (Management Assistance for Public Schools) is a program of The Partnership for New Jersey to link business and education in strengthening the management skills of district teams of public school administrators. The Partnership is a four-year-old nonprofit association of the Chief Executive Officers of New Jersey's major corporations and select nonprofit institutions. Member CEOs select, analyze, and act on issues critical to the quality of life in New Jersey. When education was identified as such an issue, the Education Task Force was formed.

Chaired by T. Joseph Semrod, Chairman and President of United Jersey Banks, the Task Force consulted with an advisory group of educators. The outcome was a consensus that business and the schools could benefit each other by member corporations offering corporate management training programs to administrative teams of school dis-

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tricts. Through further consultation with a group of corporate management trainers, MAPS—Management Assistance for Public Schools—emerged.

Corporations participate in MAPS as a corporate sponsor and/or as a provider of training. A corporate sponsor:

- Assigns a corporate liaison to work with school district administrators, corporate trainers, and Partnership staff
- Commits funds for program amenities such as travel expenses and course surveys
- Commits to a long-term partnership with the school district

A corporation providing management training commits a specific number of days to courses exclusively for the administrators of participating MAPS districts.

MAPS school districts:

- Commit to administrative staff time for MAPS training
- Match corporate sponsor funding
- Commit to a long-term partnership with the corporate sponsor

MAPS objectives are:

- To strengthen the management skills of individual school administrators
- To build opportunities in the school district to apply these skills
- To nurture long-term relationships between corporate sponsors and the school districts

The Partnership for New Jersey:

- Serves as the third-party facilitator for MAPS
- Administers the entire training phase of MAPS

After an orientation phase, including a management skill needs assessment conducted by Partnership staff, school administrators select four days of courses per year from a curriculum representing 18 management skill areas. If a district has chosen a one-year model, the training days are doubled. While administrators from a single district make diverse course selections, a district is encouraged to participate in at least one program as a management team. This initial phase concludes with a dinner for the district management team and the School Board hosted by the corporate sponsor. The training occurs over several months.

MAPS is a program in process. It has expanded from a pilot of 75 administrators from three school districts, with three corporate sponsors and six training corporations to 180 administrators from six school districts, with six corporate sponsors and twelve training corporations. There is a conscious focus on urban districts. Corporate trainers receive professional background data about each participant and each district represented in their courses. Trainers travel to school-based sites. More districts are opting to focus on a few management skill areas rather than the 18 skill areas of the MAPS curriculum.

With a two-year training phase, the district management team gathers at the end of the first year with the corporate liaison and Partnership staff to evaluate the training, to discuss how to incorporate first-year experiences, and to determine their district-specific direction of MAPS for the next year. The second year concludes with a session to evaluate the total program and to determine the nature of the long-term district-corporate collaboration.

For the last two years, MAPS has functioned as part of a consortium which received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. This Consortium, the New Jersey LEAD (Leadership in Educational Administration and Development) Center, is a multi-sector effort to hone the leadership skills

of school administrators. Participants include two professional associations of school administrators and school boards, a regional education resource center, Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, and The Partnership for New Jersey through MAPS. MAPS currently includes a pilot segment of administrative interns from Rutgers Graduate School of Education. This pilot emerges from the LEAD Consortium.

### Ingredients for Viability

School/business collaborations such as MAPS develop and maintain viability when a multiplicity of ingredients are present:

**Distress.** National business journals have given front-page coverage to the distress over public education in our nation. *Fortune's* Nancy Perry observes that "... companies that cannot hire enough skilled workers now realize they must do something to save the public schools. Not to be charitable, not to promote good public relations, but to survive."<sup>1</sup> *Business Week* and *Industry Week* have run major articles with the parallel themes.<sup>2</sup>

The Committee for Economic Development is a coalition of 250 of the nation's top business executives. In a recent publication of the CED, the belief was stated "... that a great many of the nation's schools, particularly those that serve large numbers of disadvantaged students, need a radical redefinition of their purpose and structure. This will require a fundamental restructuring of the way most schools are organized, staffed, managed, and financed."<sup>3</sup>

The distress vented by business leaders is shared by Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers. Shanker proclaimed the need for major organizational reform through a recent column titled, "Restructuring the Dinosaur."<sup>4</sup>

Distress precedes positive action. Momentum and mutuality describe the next step.

**Momentum and Mutuality.** As the frequent initiators of school/business collaborations, corporations face choices. Should they study the issues and, if so, how extensively? At what point should they act? Should they assume the stance of helper or collaborator? When The Partnership's Education Task Force confronted these choices, the mission of The Partnership had already determined brief analysis followed by action. Initial consultation with educators set the tone for collaboration. Mutuality is manifest in the commitments to MAPS from the school districts and participating corporations.

Mutuality evolves from an understanding of shared goals. In a recent study of business and the public schools, Marsha Levine notes that:

"... in the 1980s the needs of the business community and the goals of public education are converging. Each is interested in a liberally educated society, equipped with basic skills and higher-level cognitive abilities. They share the objective of educating people who can and will continue to learn for their own growth and development, as well as to be able to advance in their workplaces."<sup>5</sup>

**Commitment and Personal Involvement from the Top.** For the school/business collaboration to bear credibility for educators and corporate folk, commitment and personal involvement are needed from the top in both sectors. A criterion for participation in a MAPS partnership is commitment to MAPS goals from the district superintendent and from the CEO of the sponsoring corporation. This commitment is manifest in the behavior of personal involvement.

When a superintendent participates in MAPS training, the district administrators and the corporate participants

know that the schools are serious. When a corporate CEO participates in a MAPS orientation event and when the corporate liaison listens to the issues of individual school administrators, educators know the corporate community is serious. When a statewide entity, such as The Partnership for New Jersey, facilitates school/business collaborations, the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts.

**Perseverance.** Giants do not move quickly or trust quickly. The corporate community faces a barrage of defensiveness from the giant that is the public school system unless a commitment is made for the long haul. If the corporate sector is serious about moving from distress to momentum, perseverance will describe school/business partnerships. If the education sector is serious about reform, perseverance will describe their ventures with the private sector.

Each sector in school/business collaborations has expectations of the other, for better and worse. With perseverance, these expectations become realistic, mutual goal setting and accountability more likely, and implementation more facile.

Management training is the focus of the initial phase of MAPS collaborations. Training does not challenge management structure. Organizational development does. It remains to be seen if MAPS collaborations combining management training with organizational development will describe MAPS' future. Perseverance is critical for the kind of mutual trust needed for this to happen.

**Openness.** Openness precludes defensiveness. Openness says one does not have all the answers and does not have a steel-fisted investment in the answers one does seem to have. Openness allows one to acknowledge similarities and respect differences.

MAPS collaborations begin with the corporate sponsor—the CEO and the corporate liaison—listening. Openness to what is possible must be preceded by openness to what is. In MAPS, openness is an issue for school administrators and corporate trainers. When administrators enter a corporate management experience open to a different approach, and when corporate trainers are open to the distinct management culture of a school system, learning has a chance and the MAPS collaboration itself has a positive prognosis for goal attainment.

### The Lessons of Hindsight

Hindsight reveals indicators that, if recognized in the early phase of a school/business collaboration, predict positive outcomes for all parties. The following indicators were all present in the variety of school/business partnerships forming MAPS and offer lessons for future collaborations. Stated generically, they include:

- Belief that each party needs the expertise and resources of the other
- Clarity regarding the business needs of education and the education needs of business
- Commitment to the time, energy, and funding required to implement program goals
- Behavior of personal commitment from the top—e.g., the corporate CEO, the Education Task Force of The Partnership, the district superintendent, the district school board
- Selection of program options by participants—e.g., School administrators, not the superintendent, should select the courses in which they will participate. They should also play a key role in determining the direction of MAPS for their district.
- Respect for similarities and differences in management cultures

- Listening behavior
- Enthusiasm for the long-term opportunities of the collaboration
- Awareness of school/business collaboration as a process, requiring perseverance from both parties

#### Issues for Consideration

As MAPS has evolved, issues have surfaced which deserve careful response if the partnerships are to remain viable. These issues are sufficiently generic to apply to business/school collaborations in general. In question form, they include:

- How can a collaboration serve to "demythologize" corporate stereotypes of public school culture and public school stereotypes of corporate culture?
- Management training is not always a form of resolution when a school district suffers from ineffective management behavior. Should school/business collaborations with an initial focus on management training move into organizational development? How?
- How can a school/business collaboration with a statewide base of support such as that provided by The Partnership for New Jersey, move to a focus of restructuring the public schools and maintain mutuality?
- While educators are clear that they benefit corporations by educating the future work force, this is a long-term benefit. How can educators experience their short-term contributions to the corporate sector?
- If a school/business collaboration is based largely on the geographical location of each party, how can school districts be included that are beyond the geographical pale of potential participating corporations?
- Should a catalyst for collaboration, such as The Partnership for New Jersey, play an ongoing role in the individual school/business collaborations it has facilitated? If so, what should the role(s) be?
- How are school/business collaborations enhanced by participation in broader collaborations—e.g., the role of MAPS in the New Jersey LEAD Center?
- What nurtures the vitality of school/business collaborations over time?

#### Summary and Conclusion

The *status quo* of public education in this country is being challenged to the core by the business community. The implications for school administrators are acute. A variety of school/business collaborations has emerged. One such program is MAPS—Management Assistance for Public Schools, a statewide effort to catalyze long-term partnerships of school districts and corporations with a focus on management training for school administrators.

A case study perspective of school/business collaborations suggests ingredients for viability, lessons of hindsight, and issues to be considered. Implications are drawn for school administrators through MAPS' focus on management training for district administrative teams. For educational reform to be more than a reshuffling of the deck and for a quality work force to populate corporations, schools and business must be willing to share ownership and maintain perseverance in their collaborative ventures.

#### Footnotes

- 1 Nancy J. Perry, "Saving Schools, How Business Can Help," *Fortune*, November 7, 1988.
- 2 "Human Capital: The Decline of America's Work Force," a series of articles in *Business Week*, September 19, 1988. William H. Miller, "Employers Wrestle with 'Dumb' Kids," *Industry Week*, July 4, 1988.
- 3 **Children In Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged**, Committee for Economic Development, October, 1987, page 12.
- 4 Albert Shanker, "Restructuring the Dinosaur," *The New York Times*, October 16, 1988.
- 5 Marsha Levine, Introduction, **American Business and the Public School: Case Studies of Corporate Involvement in Public Education**, Marsha Levine and Roberta Trachtman, Editors, A Committee for Economic Development Publication, Teachers College Press, New York and London, page xxi.