

The Power of Partnering With a Public School

Executive Summary:

Most churches are aware of God's clear call to engage their community and to reach out to the lost and needy in their city. And most pastors and churches understand that, to help impact the future, we have to "get upstream" of our society's problems by connecting with families and children. However, many have no specific plan to do this. This document is about a simple and remarkably effective way to engage your local public schools...and it's transformative for both the church and the community. Most importantly, one of the great attributes of this plan is that any church...of any size...can be successful at it.

Dr. Toni Evans is the Pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas and founder of the Adopt-A-School Initiative which began as a response to a request for help from a local high school principal. What started as a crisis intervention in one school has now become a life-changing partnership in over 52 public schools, from four school districts, in Dallas County.

At Renovation Church of the Nazarene in Phoenix, we have found that dramatic things can happen in peoples' lives through very simple programs. Within the first 6 months of focusing on just a single school, through a "Christmas Family Partnership," we had 4 families (22 people) attending our church and engaging in the life of the congregation. Several of them gave their heart to Christ. While this isn't the only reason we do this (the main reason is to be Jesus to our world), in our culture, this approach may be the single most effective way to engage our community, regardless of the size or location of our church.

It is my hope and prayer that each church on our district will partner in some way and that school –church partnership will impact many for Christ.

1) BE STRATEGIC

Most of the ways that allow meaningful connection with schools are not at all difficult to do. However, it must be emphasized from the beginning that two things must exist for a partnership to be successful:

- The Lead Pastor must make this community outreach a priority. If this is seen merely as an appendage to the Children's or Missions ministries, there may be some successes. However, unless it is driven by the heart of the leader, it won't have the same impact.
- It must be seen as a core part of the church's mission to its community
- Others can (and should) manage and coordinate the programs...but it needs to be **major emphasis of the Pastor**.

The kind of change that can create incredible momentum and excitement in a church will not happen unless it is seen as a core part of the church's mission to its community and unless it is consistently kept before the church leadership and the congregation.

2) BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

- A successful school initiative is not about just starting a new program—it is about beginning a relationship with people in your community.
- Many hurting and impoverished families are very open to making connections with people who care and who provide loving support that impacts their children and their family needs.
- Not necessary for your volunteers to be educators with degrees, credentialed teachers, or even a previous connection to the school. However, often these people are willing to help. Not much administrative support is required.
- If you have teachers from your local school he or she can serve as a great liaison. Capitalize on this! The staff in most schools feel deeply for the needs they see among their students' families...but have little ability to respond. Thus, the school setting provides a natural access point to families when the church offers support for their needs.

EX. Rebecca buying shoes for kids

- It will bring people *with needs...* and the church must be *ready to provide loving support and to befriend people* across socioeconomic, cultural, and racial lines.

3) BE RESPONSIVE

- The menu of option is large and can easily be matched to *size and resources* (see addendum)
- This is very *“scalable”!* Whether your church is *large or small*, you have *ways to partner with your local school.*

6 MAJOR AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT

- Activities that help the students (e.g., tutoring, classroom reading)
- Assist with student needs (uniforms, school supplies, backpacks)
- Support and affirm teachers (monthly gift, appreciation lunch)
- **Programs/activities that help parents (English as a Second Language-ESL)**
- **Family Partnerships (Christmas, ongoing simple connections, Church Events)**
- Support School Events (parent night, school activities)

See [Appendix 1, called “Getting Practical,” for an extensive list of ideas](#) that fill in the detail of the brief list of major categories above. There are many options that make it very flexible and accessible for your church. Don’t be intimidated by the length of Appendix 1. It is so long because: 1) there are so many ways to do this and there is incredible variety of what can be done and 2) some of the events/activities/projects/programs require a detailed description.

4) BE READY.....It’s Effective:

- It is remarkably successful at *crossing the historic barriers between public education and the church.*
- It is an approach that *engages unchurched families with members of the congregation in a way that makes it easy...in fact natural...to invite them to become part of the church.*
- **There will be opportunities to invite families with which you are developing a relationship to take part in church-related activities (and then, ultimately, to invite them to church).**

You will find that God will use your partnership to create some amazing opportunities for the Gospel. But you can ruin the whole program and lose all of the opportunities if you and your people don't apply wisdom in how and where you engage in spiritual conversations.

Renovation's Experience

- Partnering with 3 schools
- 25 heads of households coming consistently and are a part of the local church community; invited others
- Served 98 people through Christmas Family Partnership
- 3 of the 5 families need transportation.
- Easter Blessing Baskets

WE ARE READY TO GO!! How do we begin?

1. Begin PRAYING for the school that the Lord will go before you and be preparing the heart of the Principal to be ready to partner.

2. Meet with the Principal. The Lead Pastor/Associate Pastor someone in authority should set up a meeting with the administration with the Principal of one of the schools near your church, preferably one that is Title 1 or under performing.

During this meeting, **simply ask what needs they have at the school. You may also ask what their dreams or wishes are.**

Most teachers and administrators have a "wish list" of things they have always wanted to do for their students but don't have the time, energy, or resources to accomplish.

At the initial meeting, be prepared to offer ideas for things your church could help with.

EX. "We know how important reading literacy is to you, would any of your teachers want someone to come in once a week for 30 minutes and read a book to the kids? They may already have ongoing programs that some of your people could help them do.

This will give you some sense of their priorities as these match what you believe your church has in terms of volunteers and resources.

3. Assess how you can meet some of those needs and wishes.

Begin by meeting just one need.....then take on the 2nd priority, and so on.

.....maybe with a classroom teacher. EX. Read to a class, Kindergarten art.

Under promise...over deliver!!!

(Reminders/Tips for Success)

- What we have found is that, if you **stay completely in “love and help” mode** while on the school grounds or when at any event that is sponsored by the school.
- **Create a relationship of trust between the teachers/school officials and your church.**
- Once this happens, **there will be opportunities to invite families with which you are developing a relationship to take part in church-related activities** (and then, ultimately, to invite them to church).
- You can **“blow up” those opportunities** if there appears to be any solicitation going on at school or at school events.
- **The school, although desperate for help, will not share their major needs and wishes with you until they know they can trust you.** For example, when you provide notebooks for students, don't slip in a gospel tract or flyer for your youth ministry. Thus, it is important to honor the “church and state boundaries” and refrain from evangelizing in the school context.
- **Trust that your actions speak louder than words.** Trust God for the outcome and who He might bring to your congregation. *Tony Evans’ team says, “Love them when you are their house...and then share Jesus when they come to your house.”*
- **You want this to be a pure offering** and don't want the school to wonder if they can trust you and your church.
- The staff realize you are a Christian and **often conversations come up naturally** (Librarian sick husband, social worker. Hands and feet of Jesus)

- **Train volunteers for safety** to follow the guidelines for appropriate adult-child interactions. Many school will require finger printing and a background checks. School policy on volunteers.
- **Be realistic about what you can do. Don't be afraid to say you can't do something.** For example, they asked you for 10 volunteers to help with "Meet the Teacher Night" and if you can't do that tell them we can only do 3 or 4.
- **Trust God for the outcome and who He might bring to your congregation.**

There's a remarkable hunger among people and they are very drawn to the body of Christ. Amazing things happen in peoples' lives through making connections with the families.

Every church has something to offer. Use your passion, assets, and volunteers to carry out a successful partnership.