



## The Episcopal Diocese of DALLAS

### **One Church/One School**

#### **Best Practices Guide**

*Partners for Education Excellence*

#### Overview

*One Church/One School* is an initiative of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas to promote partnerships between churches parishes and mission and public schools or (private schools with needs) in order to support efforts in achieving excellence in education.

The Missional Church Commission (MCC) believes that the success of students can be tremendously improved by the involvement of churches as partners with schools to provide support and to enhance the quality of education through tutoring, mentoring, teacher appreciation, or other needs that may have been identified.

#### Goal and Best Practices

The goal of *One Church/One School* is for every parish in the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas to develop at least one partnership with a local school in order to support their efforts of providing quality education. As part of this goal, the *Best Practices Guide* was created as a tool to assist churches in developing successful partnerships with schools in their community. This document will be ever changing and edited over time as more is learned and shared among churches and schools about how partnerships are best achieved.

For more information about The Episcopal Diocese's One Church One School initiative, please contact Dabney Dwyer, Missioner for Outreach, Episcopal Diocese of Dallas. 214 5007208/dwyerdab@gmail.com

## BEST PRACTICES

### 1. Your Church Identity and Start-up

- Before starting a partnership with a school, it is important to be clear about the mission/vision of your church.
  - How does serving others in the world and the community fit into the mission of your church?
  - What is your church's philosophy about serving outside the walls of the church?
  - What is your church's mission (statement) for community outreach?
  - Do you have a community outreach team or committee?
- Develop a small team of people who are interested in pursuing a church, school partnership and can help with initial start-up activities.
- Make sure the Rector and Vestry are on board with the initial effort to explore opportunities.
- Consider offering Bible study about God's heart for the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, the sick and friendless in order to equip church members for service.

### 2. Define Your "Community"

- Define a small geographical area such as a neighborhood, zip code or block area in order to begin understanding the community in which your church is located.
- Start by collecting basic population and demographic data as well as other community data about the defined area (i.e. schools, other agencies).
- Share information about your community with the congregation.

### 3. School Identification

- Identify schools in the neighborhood or nearby to the location of your church. Parishioners *may* tend to be more interested in a school that is located in close proximity of the church.
- Search online to gain more information about the schools of interest. Most school districts have websites and those websites often have links to a particular school website. Also check out [www.citydata.com](http://www.citydata.com).
- Typically schools having a larger percentage of minorities or low- income students will be identified as having the most needs.

**Note:** *In Texas, Title I schools are schools identified with at least 40% of students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program.*

#### 4. Initial School Contact

- Once information has been gathered, select a school to visit.
- Learn the Principal's and Vice Principal's name and call to make an appointment.
- Be persistent. Often it takes time and effort to get an appointment. If you are unable to get an appointment with the Principal initially, try the Counselor or Vice Principal.
- Keep the first appointment more formal with the goal of getting to know the school and having the school leadership get to know your church. Only one or two people from your team should attend. Ask for a tour of the school during the first meeting.
- Ask the principal what the school's biggest needs are.
- Be prepared to tell the school why you are there. That is, that you want to get to know the school in hopes that a partnership might be developed. And that you have no agenda except to see how your church might be able to help support the school.
- Never go with an agenda or ideas about what you "think" the school needs. Be prepared to listen well.
- *See First Amendment Guide (below).*

#### 5. Arrange a Second Meeting

- If the first meeting went well and there seems to be an amicable relationship, arrange a second meeting to discuss in more detail what the school's needs are and what the church might be able to do to help.
- Ask the Principal to bring other leaders in the school, i.e. counselor, reading specialist, librarian, etc.
- Have a brainstorming session to allow the Principal and teachers list what their needs are. Prioritize those needs and come to some agreement as to what the church is going to do to assist the schools efforts what should be the next steps.

#### 6. Build Relationships

- Develop a small team from the church to oversee the process moving forward.
- The Principal may want to establish a contact person from the school as well.
- Consider starting with one easy "first step" project for the school in order to build relationships and trust among the school staff.
- Examples might include; lunch for staff, grounds beautification or helping in the school library... any activity that shows your presence.

## 7. Develop a Plan

- As relationships develop and more opportunity exists for church involvement, develop a simple plan that reflects needs and opportunities for helping the school. An example of a plan might include:
  - Key Goals (what is the end result, the desired goal)
  - Major Actions/Tasks (what actions need to take place in order to accomplish the goal)
  - Responsibility (identify those who can make things happen)
  - Timing (what is the timeframe to complete your goals, actions)
  - Measurement (how will you know that you have completed your goal- or moved closer to the end result.) This is most important for activities that involve benchmarks, TAKS, other measurements of education.
- Share the plan with school and church leadership to make sure everyone is in agreement for moving forward.

## 8. Get the Congregation Involved

- Educate the congregation about your initiative. Focus on why you are developing the partnership and what you are trying to accomplish.
- Consider having the Principal come speak to the congregation about the school, the needs of the school and future plans.
- Communicate to the congregation what the plans are with the school, how many volunteers are needed and specifically what you are asking volunteers to do.
- Be clear about “time” commitment. Put in writing if necessary.
- Call people personally to take on a leadership role or to simply volunteer.
- Use sign-up sheets, posters, bulletin and newsletter notices to inform the congregation.
- Plan for appropriate back ground checks, orientation for volunteers (i.e. through the school or school district) as well as the Diocese required Safe Church Training.

## 9. Follow-up

- Once programs are underway, continually follow-up with the Principal and other school leaders to insure that the programs are running smoothly.
- Determine process for addressing issues as they arise.
- Meet frequently (once per quarter) with leaders involved in ministry at the school.
- Once or twice per year, have volunteers get together to share their stories, discuss issues with the programs, success stories, etc. Share these wonderful stories with the rest of the congregation.
- Celebrate success of your ministries or programs.

## 10. Types of School Projects (partial list)

- Tutoring (reading, math skills)
- Mentoring (see school counselor or school districts first to see if they have an established program).
- Teacher lounge refurbishing, painting, art for bulletin boards.
- Field day volunteers.
- Field trip volunteers.
- Science fair judges.
- Backpack and school supplies drive (beginning of school year).
- Grounds beautifications (plant shrubs, flowers).
- Teacher appreciation (lunches, snacks or small gifts for teachers and staff).
- Supply drive (teachers never have enough supplies!).
- Food and clothing drives.
- Office and library support.

## 11. First Amendment: Separation of Church and State

According to Public Schools and Religious Communities, A First Amendment Guide published by the First Amendment Center, schools and religious institutions may have different missions, but they share many of the same civic and moral values. Both are located in most neighborhoods and each is committed within its own role to the wellbeing of children.

By working together in ways that are permissible under the First Amendment, as interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court, schools and religious communities can do much to enhance the mission of public school education. For recommended guidelines for developing partnerships between churches and schools, go to [www.firstamendmentcenter.org](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org) or see Resources and Tools on this website for a printable PDF version of the entire document.

## 12. Safe Church Practices

Safe Church Training offered by the Diocese is required for all church employees and all volunteers who spend extended periods of time with children or youth. **Churches engaged in partnerships with schools in where lay leaders, employees or clergy come in direct contact with children (i.e. tutoring, mentoring programs), are required to offer safe church training to those staff and volunteers who participate in those activities. In addition, schools and or school districts may have requirements as well before involvement.**