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Partnerships benefit companies

New programs using public-private partnerships in education provide exciting opportunities for the business sector.

Every successful leader recognizes that professional partnerships help grow business and deepen connections within the community. Although most businesses in our community are not centered on education, the dotted line that runs from school quality to a strong community to a healthy business environment is readily apparent.

One of the greatest challenges businesses face today is attracting and retaining well-trained employees. This can be particularly problematic for high tech companies that require employees with advanced expertise. High-quality schools that attract families and foster crucial skills for future workers clearly help meet these needs.

Along with the challenge of attracting the right employees is the challenge of offering the workplace environment and benefits that encourage employee loyalty. Many companies recognize that their employees want to volunteer in their communities and are looking for well-designed programs that maximize their limited time and provide rewarding experiences.

Public-private educational partnerships enable businesses to offer meaningful volunteer opportunities to their employees that not only benefit the community, but help their companies gain positive community relations.

Another benefit is that businesses can provide mentoring and internship opportunities that offer students invaluable experiences that foster professional development starting in high school.

This trend of increased partnership is of course welcomed by public schools. Schools not only need support in these days of reduced educational funding, but also increasingly rely on outside technical expertise to mentor students, particularly in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields so they can, in turn, help companies continue to compete in today's global economy.

The Bellevue School District provides several effective partnerships. For example, a new STEM program at Sam-

GETTING INVOLVED



Bill Pollard

mamish High School features additional classes that use problem-based learning with a unifying focus on "Engineering Global Solutions."

Education today is evolving toward a new model of problem-based learning. Problem-based learning introduces real-world projects into the classroom, making what students learn more meaningful and relevant. Accordingly,

the business community's involvement is essential in making these programs work.

The Sammamish High School model increases college and career readiness by closing achievement gaps and increasing rigor and equity by weaving together proven program segments in a new way. One important component is significant emphasis on mentoring: partnering STEM professionals with students, teachers and classroom project teams.

Another example for business participation in the educational community is Bellevue's new Big Picture School, which opens in September.

This model, found also in the Shoreline School District, engages community mentors as active participants in projects that are focused on each student's particular interests and goals, with a "real-world" approach to the entire curriculum, much like the STEM program at Sammamish.

Of course, it's crucial that volunteer jobs are designed around the availability and interests of busy full-time workers. Community organizations such as the Bellevue Schools Foundation, which are supported by individuals, families and businesses, fund staff to help provide training to business volunteers, and then assign volunteers to projects that match their expertise, interest and schedules.

Ideally, volunteers will gain from the experience in equal, though different, ways. Students benefit through real-world experience, and businesses benefit by helping provide the foundation for building that educated workforce they need. Effective partnerships result in gains for everyone involved.

BILL POLLARD is a member of the Bellevue Schools Foundation board of trustees and co-founder of Talon Private Capital.



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