



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How does a church/school partnership benefit my community?

We know that 97% of a generation is flowing through your local school.

When we help make improvements in a school, we impact the entire community.

Third grade reading levels are indicators of future success. Before third grade, students are learning to read. After third grade, they read to learn in every other subject.

Third graders not reading on grade level are 4 times more likely to drop out of high school. They also experience significantly higher rates of juvenile delinquency, lifelong poverty, dependence on welfare, adult illiteracy and incarceration. (SC Education Oversight Committee.)

When we invest in a community, we let those around us know that we care about them. Our beliefs about Who God is, His plans for us, and His love for those around us shapes our actions. When people see this goodness manifested in our actions, it opens the door to sharing the Good News of Jesus' love.

How does a church/school partnership benefit my church?

If your purpose is to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), to show love in deed and truth (1 John 3:18), or to be a help to those in need, seek justice and correct oppression (Isaiah 1:17), loving those in your community will be a fulfillment of your calling.

Church members have opportunities to use God-given gifts, interests and abilities to make a difference in lives, fulfilling their purpose and growing in discipleship.

The community will come to know your church as more than a building. They will begin to see your church as a loving body of believers who offer love, grace and fellowship.

As relationships develop, you will have opportunities to share your faith, to disciple and to minister on a different level.

Many pastors have found that as they and their church members invest in their community, the community looks to them in times of crisis. The pastor becomes the "chaplain" to turn to for prayer, guidance and comfort. The pastor is often asked to walk alongside administrators who must navigate death and grief with their students and/or teachers. Pastors can do this in a way that points others to the hope we have in Jesus.

Many doors are opened when we choose to simply ask, "How can I help?". There are no hidden agendas. We just communicate through words and actions: We want to get to know you - care for you - walk beside you - and bless you.

How do I get started?

1. Take time to learn more about the schools in your area. Do some have more needs than others? Do you have Title 1 schools near you? Do you have teachers/ staff in your church who work in these schools?
2. Pray. Ask God to lead you in deciding where to serve, to open doors and give wisdom and discernment as you move forward.
3. As you begin, focus on one school and its specific needs.
4. Make an appointment with the school principal and let him/her know why you want to meet. Cold calls and emails are not the best way to make a connection. If you have teachers or staff who work at the school in your church, you may want to ask them to pave the way for your call.
5. Introduce yourself and let the principal know why you are there. You might say something like: "I know that you care deeply for the children and the families represented in this school. We care deeply for our community and we would like to walk beside you and help in meeting some of the needs of your school. We want our community to know that we care about them."
6. Go with "open hands", meaning no agenda or preset ideas of what is needed. Ask, "How can we help?" Other phrases to get the conversation going: "What is your greatest need?" "What keeps you awake at night?" They may answer something very specific: landscaping of the campus, painting of rooms, the need for school supplies, furniture for a teacher lounge, or a place to hold a large event.
7. Listen carefully. Do not promise to do more than you can handle. Always under promise and over deliver.
8. If they do not express specific ways to help, let them know about the three buckets of Heart4Schools that were identified by the Education and Oversight Committee: Reading Buddies, Teacher Support, Backpacks for food in-secure. (See our brochure or website for more information.)
9. You may realize that the expressed need is greater than what your church can provide. Only promise to do what you know you can deliver. Also remember that God is a God of great resources. Maybe there are other churches or organizations who might walk alongside you in this ministry. Schools cannot ask businesses to make donations, but churches can make this request for them.
10. Determine the school's volunteer guidelines and security protocols as well as your congregational policies regarding child safety.
11. Prepare volunteers with adequate training. Help them understand what is expected, give resources and be sure they understand the goal of relationship building and caring for students and teachers as they serve.

How do I build relationships and trust?

1. Go in without an agenda. Under promise and over deliver.
2. Get to know the administrator. Develop a relationship.
3. Focus on encouraging and supporting teachers/staff. Send them notes of encouragement. Find tangible ways to bless them.
4. Be present for school activities and events, making a point to talk with students and teachers.
5. When you provide a luncheon, take time to talk with teachers, affirm their work and your appreciation for them. Get to know them.
6. Mentoring and tutoring provide great opportunities for creating relationships. If you are a reading buddy, get to know your child and spend time talking with them each week.
7. Stay for the "long haul". Long-term commitment is essential to building trust and to making a difference in mentoring relationships.

What are practical ways that others have served their schools?

Every community, school and church are different. They have their own cultures, demographics, needs and gifts. This means that every ministry will look a little different – even if you are doing the same type of ministry.

The following list is meant to serve as ideas gleaned from other ways churches have found to partner with their local school:

1. **Supply student needs:** fill backpacks with school supplies to be given away at the beginning of the year; provide extra school supplies in January when supplies have run out; develop a program to outfit kids with needed clothes – shoes, jackets, hats, gloves. (One church works all year to provide shoes for every child in the school at Christmas. They meet to pray over these shoes as they are being wrapped for delivery.) Fill “backpacks” with food to be taken home over the weekend for children who are food insecure.
2. **Help students succeed:** serve as a reading buddy; provide after school tutoring; mentor elementary, middle or high school students weekly by meeting them at lunch; organize a summer program to provide tutoring or reading experiences. One church provides a “Feed and Read” once a week during the summer, providing lunch and a volunteer to read one-on-one with each child. Another church hosts a “Real Men Read” and recently had over 100 men (from church and the community- firemen, policemen, military) come and read in classrooms.
3. **Offer your church facilities for events:** Churches may be used for sports banquets, graduations, baccalaureates, end of year luncheons/celebrations, offsite meetings. Some churches have provided meals for families at their church along with a book giveaway. They also had a photographer take pictures of families and paid to have all pictures processed.
4. **Support and affirm the work of teachers:** Host a “Back to School” brunch for teachers on their first day back; get to know the teachers. Send notes and cards of appreciation. Give a tangible gift to show your appreciation. Give gift cards to new teachers who are setting up their classrooms and spending much out of their own pockets. Host a coffee cart once a month. Ask your school how you can help during Teacher Appreciation Week. Provide snacks in the teachers lounge with an encouraging note once a month. Gift teachers with school supplies to restock what is needed. Teachers often pay for this out of their pockets. Ideas of classroom needs: hand sanitizer, Kleenex, wipes, pencils, paper, copy paper, expo markers, pens. Ask if you can volunteer in the classroom or in any other way in the school.
5. **Cultivate support for teachers and schools from the pulpit:** Help your church understand the theological reasons for working with children at schools. Invite an administrator to come and speak – sharing needs AND successes. Thank them for their work and pray for them and their school. Celebrate good work of school staff. Share a picture and story of each teacher every week in the bulletin and pray for that person during the service. If you don't do this for the whole school, do this for the teachers and staff in your church. When everyone heads back to school in August, have a commissioning for your teachers. They are shaping lives in your community every day.

Are there any Do's and Don'ts?

South Carolina is blessed to have approval from the South Carolina Department of Education to partner with schools. They recognize the benefits that our congregations can bring through resources, time, abilities and love.

As we serve with the mind-set that we are being the hands and feet of Jesus, we want to represent Him well. We want to be consistent, loving, compassionate and generous.

If we are asked why we are serving, we can tell them that it is because God loves us, and we want to share that love with others. We do not bring up our religious beliefs or proselytize. We must remember that we are invited guests, and we need to respect our schools by following their policies.

Be sure to talk with school administrators about appropriate background checks for all volunteers, just as you would in your own church.