

So your business wants to get involved with the schools?

Supporting students and schools has long been a worthwhile effort for businesses. This type of support can take different forms, and different forms of support can have more or less impact on students and their learning. Finding the right fit for the business, the teachers, and the students is critical.

The types of support fall into three broad categories:

- Financial or other donated support. Examples of this include donations of money or equipment. We call this “**flyover support.**”
- Technical assistance such as advice on career type curriculum and equipment. Examples of this might include helping teachers set up a computer lab. We call this “**technical assistance.**”
- Face-to-face interaction with the students and teachers. Examples of this include working directly with schools by providing real life work situations with assistance in helping students and teachers understand the situations, identify and solve problems, and develop innovations. We call this “**boots on the ground.**”

We also have adopted the terms “benevolent partner” and “stakeholder partner.” The benevolent partner is primarily motivated by good citizenship; giving back is what good businesses owe the community. In addition to **giving back**, stakeholder partners see their contribution to education as an **investment in the future** workforce and vitality of a community and their business.

A benevolent partner is one who helps out but is not hands-on, whereas a stakeholder partner is right there in the trenches with the students and teachers. The closer to “stakeholder” a partnership becomes, the deeper the impact for the students and teachers, as well as the partner.

In decades past, employers rarely entered the door of a school building to help a student in academic pursuits. In today’s fast-paced world we are finding many ways for employers to come to school, to host students in the workplace, and to generally help teachers and students keep up with how the world works outside of school — thus providing a context for all learning. In Nashville, some partners have adopted all three levels of the partnership types we are describing. As an example, at Pearl Cohn Entertainment High School, music industry partners donate equipment, help set it up, and regularly visit the school to coach the students and teachers in all aspects of the entertainment business.

In decades past, businesses would often donate money or equipment to help a school, often without any real knowledge of how useful that money or equipment really was. Imagine a world where businesses not only donate money, equipment, and advice, but also give their time to interact with teachers and students directly. By doing so, employers gain a bird’s eye view of the impact of both their donations and advice. At the same time, the employer partners gain a deep understanding of the challenges of education, we have observed, and learn to be real partners with educators. This is a winning proposition for all involved.

When employers work directly with students and bring real world context to a student’s learning, the impact is great. This scenario gives academic learning real context and engages students in their own learning. Research in education tells us this is a very productive situation for learning everything. Learning is actually rigorous, and does not seem hard because it is fun and engaging.

The right fit for your company may be all three levels, or it may be only one of the three. We have found that the right fit results in positive impact for students, teachers, and employers.

Benevolent Partner

Benevolent partners are typically involved at the school-level. They provide donations of money and/or materials and may provide curriculum advice or technical assistance. Partners who are more engaged at this level will often attend advisory board meetings and provide input and support to individual academies.

Benevolent Partner



Flyover Level

Donation with no other involvement

- Financial Support
- Donation of equipment and other materials



Benevolent Partner



Technical Support Level

Advice and technical assistance

- Curriculum advice
- Advisory committee membership
- Equipment installation and support



Stakeholder Partner

This is where the rubber really meets the road at the school level. We like to refer to this as the “boots on the ground level,” because these partners are fully engaged with students. Often, stakeholder partners are involved with career exploration activities for students, host teacher externships and student internships, mentor students and teachers, and ask for students to help them solve current real-world problems and challenges. Like benevolent partners, these partners usually also provide donations and attend advisory board meetings, but their engagement is at a much deeper level.

Stakeholder Partner



Boots on the Ground Level

Full engagement with students

- Career exploration involvement
- Teacher externships
- Teacher mentors
- Student mentors
- Student internships
- Real-world problems



*** Note: Boots on the ground model is best implemented with interdisciplinary teams of academic and career teachers and business partners.

Combined Engagement = Best Results

Business engagement at the school-level often begins at the “flyover” level, then gradually builds to the “technical support” level, then finally to the “boots on the ground” level. Because schools and academies need all of these types of engagement, the best approach is to have a menu of options for engagement so that prospective and existing business partners can choose the level that is right for them.

